ELLERY QUEEN

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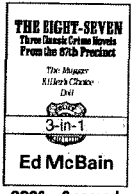

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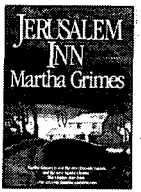

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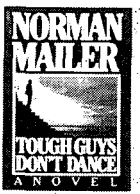

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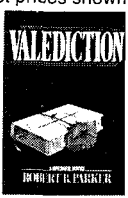

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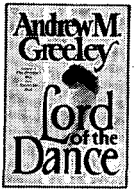

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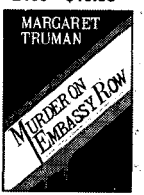

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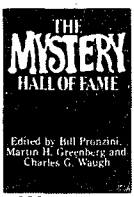

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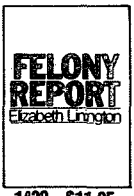

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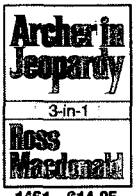

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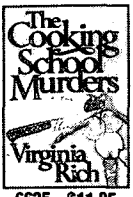

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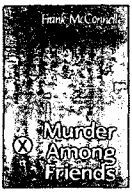

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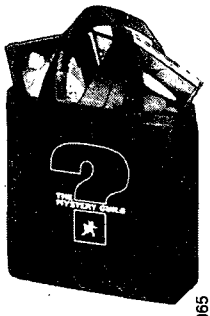

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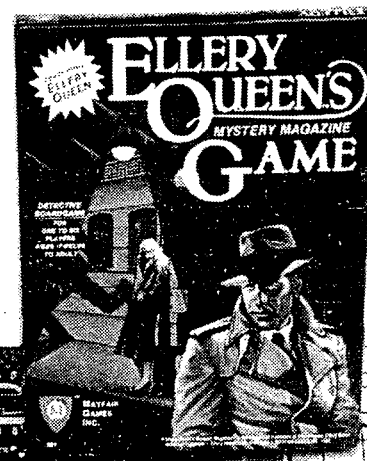

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"It's a long story and it's late," Leopold told Molly.

"Not that late."

"I've never told anyone about Matt Slater."

"Tell me." Her hand stroked his shoulder, and somehow the darkness and the drinks he'd had earlier made it easier for him to talk . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD'S SECRET

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Ever since Captain Leopold's new wife Molly had gotten out of criminal law to devote her time to civil cases, they'd taken to having Lieutenant Fletcher and his wife and Connie Trent out to the house for dinner every month or two. Molly had really liked the people on the Violent Crimes Squad and one of the disappointments of her new job was that it kept her from seeing them so often. The dinners were a way of making up for it, and generally Leopold enjoyed them as much as she did. Entertaining at home was something he'd missed in the twenty-odd years between his marriages.

But this Saturday night, after an hour or so of reminiscing about Leopold's early days in the department following an apprenticeship in New York City, he became unusually quiet. After Fletcher and his wife and Connie left a little before midnight, Molly asked, "What's bothering you? You grew so quiet all of a sudden."

"Nothing," he assured her. "I'm all right."

But later when they were in bed, she brought up the subject again. "It was when Fletcher mentioned Matt Slater, wasn't it?"

"I don't know. I guess so."

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"We haven't had any secrets till now," she reminded him. "Why won't you tell me about it?"

"It's a long story and it's late."

"Not that late."

"I've never told anyone about Matt Slater."

"Tell me." Her hand stroked his shoulder, and somehow the darkness and the drinks he'd had earlier made it easier for him to talk.

Matt Slater never called him Captain. That was enough to annoy Leopold from the very beginning, but there was much more. It was still called the Homicide Squad back in the early 1960s and Leopold had returned to the city of his youth to take command of it. Slater was a detective-sergeant then, like Fletcher, except that he was big and hard—the traditional tough cop of the old pulp magazines. He smoked cigarettes endlessly and kidded Fletcher about his youth, though Fletcher was almost the same age as Leopold. Perhaps it was just that Leopold felt and acted older when Slater was in the room, being loud and brassy and endlessly annoying.

Was he a good cop? That was the important question, and it was one Leopold couldn't answer. Slater had worked with him on his first two big cases, a child-killing and a bombing at the university, but he'd contributed little toward their solutions.

It wasn't until the third case that a conflict developed between them. A murder had occurred at a home for the elderly and seemed without any rational motive. It was an unusually warm Tuesday in late October—Halloween, in fact—and Leopold and Slater left their topcoats behind when they responded to the call from the Greenwillow Retirement Home shortly after eleven A.M.

The victim was Kate Singleton, a spry 77-year-old who had come to the home because she had no family to look after her. The director of the home, a grim-faced man in his fifties named Raymond Church, led them past a score of elderly women and men dressed incongruously as tramps and elves, scarecrows and clowns, some of them masked. A uniformed officer had already arrived and was standing with his back firmly against the closed door of the dead woman's room.

"I didn't want anyone to touch anything until you arrived, Captain," he explained. "This is a weird one."

Leopold stepped past him into the room and stared at the old woman in the chair. She was dressed in the costume of a witch, wearing an old black dress, a worn black-wool cape, a black wig,

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and a false hooked nose. A pointed hat made of stiff black paper had fallen to the floor by her side. Around her neck was a tightly knotted scarf.

Slater grunted as he followed Leopold into the room. "Strangled, from the look of it."

"Call in the lab boys." Leopold turned to Church. "Do you know who did it?"

"Not for sure. Cindy, one of the nurses, says she came along and saw Ralph Potelli close the door and hurry down the hall. He's our handyman and custodian."

Matt Slater grunted. "You mean janitor."

"We don't call them that any more," Church said stiffly.

"Any trouble with him before?" Leopold asked.

"Nothing unusual. Sometimes he acts a bit strange."

"Go find him, Slater," Leopold said. "Be careful."

The technicians and the medical examiner arrived a short while later and Leopold was kept busy with the physical aspects of the murder scene. When he saw Slater again, about twenty minutes later, he had a thin, ashen-faced man in tow. "You want to question him?" Slater asked Leopold.

"In here," Leopold said, motioning toward an empty room.

"I didn't know she was dead," the man told them. He wore dark-green workpants and a grey shirt that almost matched his face. "I come up to change a lightbulb in the bathroom and when I opened the door she looked like she was asleep in the chair."

"With a scarf knotted around her throat?" Slater asked.

"I didn't really notice. I guess I thought it was part of her costume. They dress up for Halloween, like kids."

"So you didn't enter the room?" Leopold wanted to know.

"No. I seen her like that—asleep, I thought—and I left."

Leopold excused himself and returned in a few seconds with a light bulb in a corrugated-paper container. "This was on the top of the dresser. Did you bring it with you?"

"I—yeah, I guess so."

"Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"If you didn't enter the room, how did it get to the top of the dresser, five feet from the door?"

"Well, I guess I went in that far before I realized she was asleep."

"Dead, not asleep."

"I thought she was asleep."

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"Mr. Potelli, we're going to have to take you downtown for further questioning."

The custodian's lower lip started to tremble. "Am I under arrest?"

"No," Leopold told him. "We just want to ask you some more questions."

He left Ralph Potelli with Slater and went back across the hall. A couple of elderly residents were sobbing openly as the morgue attendants removed the body. Leopold went up to a small woman in clown makeup and asked if Kate Singleton had been a friend of hers.

"Oh, a *good* friend," the woman replied, looking up at him through thick glasses. "I'm Mavis Oakes. I've known Kate from the day she first came here, nearly a year ago. I can't imagine something like this happening. Is it true that Ralph killed her?"

Leopold frowned at the woman. "No, we're still investigating the case. Is there any reason for you to suspect that Mr. Potelli did it? Did he ever threaten her, or anyone else?"

"No, of course not! Ralph wouldn't hurt a fly!"

"I understand he acted strangely at times."

A second woman, steadying herself with a cane, spoke up. "Sometimes he doesn't seem to know you. He'll be real friendly one minute and in a daze the next. I told him once he should see a doctor." She lowered herself into a wheelchair, adjusting a marginal tramp costume.

"What's your name?" Leopold asked her with a smile.

"Selma Kersh," she said, self-consciously touching dirt spots on her face. "This is my tramp makeup, but Cindy never finished with it. I guess there won't be a party now."

"Do you have a Halloween party every year?"

"Oh, yes," Mavis Oakes said. "We have parties for all the holidays. But Halloween is the most fun because we get to dress in costumes, and our families come in costume, too."

"And your nurse, Cindy, helps you with the makeup?"

They both nodded. "She's in charge of it," Selma Kersh answered. "She plans all the parties."

Leopold found Cindy Dillon at the nurse's station on the main floor. She was dispensing medication into little envelopes for distribution to the residents. When she saw him she stopped and asked, "Did you arrest Ralph? Did he kill her?"

"We don't know yet, Miss Dillon. We're just taking him downtown

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for further questioning." She was an attractive young woman whose troubled expression didn't mask her charms.

"I'm trying to pretend it's life as usual so I don't have to think about it. I was in there just an hour ago, helping her into her witch's costume, fixing up her face—"

"Tell me about the costume party."

"Oh, it's not much different from the parties we have on other holidays, except that I get out some old clothes and dress the patients up. They enjoy it. Maybe it makes them feel like kids again. We keep the costumes a secret, even from their families. It seems to add to the fun."

"How long have you been a nurse here, Miss Dillon?"

"Over two years. The pay isn't that great and most don't stay as long as I have. But I like working with elderly people."

"What about the dead woman, Kate Singleton? How did she get along with the other women?"

"Fine. Everyone liked Kate."

"Do you have many male patients?"

"Not as many. They're on the second floor."

"Has anyone ever had trouble with Ralph Potelli?"

"Mr. Church wouldn't have kept him on if there were problems."

That seemed reasonable enough, but Leopold decided he wanted to hear it from Church himself. He found him in his office, just finishing a call to his lawyer.

"I was checking our legal position," he explained to Leopold. "Miss Singleton had no relatives to file suit, but there's always a possibility someone might try to hold the Greenwillow Home responsible."

Leopold settled down in a chair opposite the desk. "I have a number of questions, Mr. Church, starting with Ralph Potelli."

"Is he a suspect?"

"He left a fresh light bulb on top of the bureau. He says he went in, thought she was asleep, and left."

"Potelli's acted odd at times, but I put it down to health problems. He's been known to have blackouts from time to time. But he's always seemed harmless and he does his job. Everyone likes him."

"Never any trouble between him and the dead woman?"

"Never any trouble, period."

"We'll want to question several other people, including yourself. For one thing, we need to know where everyone was during the period when the murder took place."

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"That's easy enough for me. I was right here in this office, going over the morning mail."

"You didn't go down the hall past Mrs. Singleton's room for any reason?"

"I don't know—I might have. I'm often back and forth. But I was at my desk for most of the morning."

Leopold rose to his feet. "Thank you, Mr. Church. I'll be checking with you again after we get a better idea of the time of death."

He spoke to Cindy Dillon again and established that she'd finished dressing Kate Singleton in her costume a little after ten. It was around eleven o'clock when she saw Potelli apparently leaving the room. The woman had been strangled sometime during that hour. Unfortunately, preparations for the party had kept everyone busy and there had been much moving around. People had been in and out of each other's rooms and no one could say how many visitors, if any, Mrs. Singleton might have had. The room directly across the hall was unoccupied, so there was no witness close at hand about any activity until Cindy went in and found the body.

When Leopold got back to Headquarters he found Matt Slater waiting to see him. "I think Potelli's ready to crack. Give me another hour with him and I'll have a confession."

"What are you using?" Leopold asked sourly. "A rubber hose?"

"He's admitted he has blackouts. He could have killed her without knowing it."

"Have you asked him if he wants a lawyer? Have you suggested a mental examination?"

"A lawyer's on the way over. But I figured I could get an admission out of him in the meantime. We could move him someplace where the lawyer couldn't find him right away. We did it all the time in the old days."

"This isn't the old days," Leopold said, walking past the sergeant to his office. "Stay away from him until the lawyer gets here."

Slater followed him to the door. "Maybe you'll sing a different tune when the newspapers start clamoring for an arrest."

Leopold, now at his desk, turned to him, deciding he'd never disliked anyone quite as much. "An arrest isn't our only goal, Slater. We want the guilty party—with enough hard evidence for a conviction. One of these years the Supreme Court is going to come down hard on the sort of law enforcement you practice."

"The guy is guilty, Captain. You might as well face it."

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Leopold was startled at Slater's use of his title. It was something he'd never done before and seemed to signal a change in their relationship, but he couldn't decide if it was for better or for worse.

"Let's talk this over," he said. "Just consider the possibility Potelli didn't strangle her. Who else is there?"

Slater accepted the unspoken invitation and slipped into the chair across the desk. "The old folks. The nurses. That Church fellow. But none of them makes sense unless we come up with a motive."

"There's no motive for Potelli, either."

"But he had the opportunity. A witness places him at the scene and he admits being there. Besides, he lied about not entering the room when he thought she was asleep. Said he just stepped inside. Do you believe that?"

"Maybe he had a blackout," Leopold suggested.

"And maybe she caught him stealing something. Sometimes these cases aren't half as mysterious as you try to make them. Sometimes the most likely suspect really is the killer, and with the right questions we can get a quick—"

He was interrupted by Sergeant Fletcher, who entered with a plastic bag full of clothes. "These are from the Singleton woman, Captain. The M.E. suggests you examine the cape."

"Thanks, Fletcher."

Leopold carefully removed the cape from the bag and spread it out on a table. Then he saw that the Medical Examiner had attached a small glassine envelope with a simple note: *Found in the lining of cape.*

Leopold held up the envelope and peered at it. "Looks like a diamond," Slater said.

"Get a jeweler to check on it." Leopold handed over the envelope and started feeling around the lining of the cape. He came upon the torn seam almost at once and felt around inside, but there was nothing else to be found. He picked up the phone and dialed.

"I'm just typing up a preliminary report," the Medical Examiner told him. "You should have it in an hour. You caught us on a slow day."

"Any hidden wounds?"

"Nothing. No bruises, except for the strangling. No sexual assault. Based upon the time she ate breakfast, I'd place the time of death at around ten forty-five or eleven A.M.

So it could have been Potelli or someone else. "What about this diamond you found? If it is a diamond."

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"We were undressing the body and it dropped onto the autopsy table. I figure it was inside that torn lining."

"Just the one?"

"That's all we found. It looks real to me. What do you think?"

"I'm having it checked now. Thanks for your help, Doc."

He hung up and went back to the cape. The wool was worn and motheaten in spots, and the garment seemed to have little value. But the most interesting thing about it was the split lining. It hadn't pulled free as one might have expected—it was carefully cut. The loose threads were still in place, indicating to Leopold that the job had been done recently. He was almost certain now that the diamond would prove to be genuine, that Kate Singleton had been killed for gems hidden in the lining of her cape, and that the killer had overlooked one in his haste.

He started looking randomly through the other items of clothing on the table. It was the black dress that struck him as odd. The size seemed much too large for a woman of Kate Singleton's stature and it occurred to him that it might not have belonged to her.

He picked up the telephone again and called the Greenwillow Home. When he had Cindy Dillon on the line he identified himself. "How's it going there?"

She sighed. "About as well as we could expect. Everyone's pretty broken up, and some of the women are terrified there's a killer prowling around. We've cancelled the party."

"I was wondering about the costumes. How do—"

"They're just some old clothes we have around. I get them out every year and we find embellishments where we can."

"You mean they don't belong to the people who wear them?"

"Not usually, no. Frankly, Captain Leopold, when our patients pass away here, the family often has no use for their clothing. They tell us to keep it. We give some of it away to charity but we have a closet full of items we use for costumes."

"What about the cape Mrs. Singleton was wearing?"

"It was so worn we almost threw it away last year. But a cape was a natural for a witch's costume, so I saved it and dug it out for her."

"Do you remember who it belonged to originally?"

"Sure. Mrs. Kersh's older sister, Mildred."

When Leopold returned to the Greenwillow Home in late afternoon, Selma Kersh's husband Frank had arrived to visit her. He

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was a slim white-haired man wearing a fringed jacket and a cowboy hat. "I just got here," he explained to Leopold as they were introduced. "I came dressed for the Halloween party, but Selma told me what happened."

"I'm glad you're here. I wanted to speak to Mrs. Kersh about her sister."

Selma Kersh looked startled. "Mildred? She's been dead almost a year now. I sent money to the Church of Peace for her."

"You were here together?"

She nodded. "Mildred was here first. She came about two years ago. Then when I got so bad Frank couldn't take care of me any more she encouraged me to join her.

"Excuse me for prying into your personal affairs, Mrs. Kersh, but was your sister well off? Did she have money or jewelry?"

"Well, her husband earned good money in the diamond business, but he died years ago. Even a comfortable nest-egg can go fast in these nursing homes."

"The diamond business," Leopold repeated. "After her death, did you find any diamonds?"

"Not a one," Frank Kersh replied. "I guess she got rid of them all."

Leopold took the glassine envelope from his pocket. "This single diamond was found in the lining of the cape Mrs. Singleton was wearing when she died. Nurse Dillon tells me it once belonged to your sister, Mrs. Kersh."

Her husband had gone pale. "You mean there were diamonds hidden in that cape? I searched through her clothes myself before we agreed the home could keep them. I never found a thing."

"But you could have missed a few diamonds in a lining quite easily," Leopold pointed out. "And they'd make a quite substantial motive for murder."

"Do you think that man Ralph Potelli killed her for them?" Selma Kersh asked.

Leopold turned to her. "Why kill her when he could have taken them from the cape in the closet at any other time? And how would he know the diamonds were there?"

"It makes you wonder if I might have missed something else in her clothing," Frank Kersh mused.

"I'd like you both to come and look in the closet where Nurse Dillon keeps these things," Leopold said.

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"You go, Frank," Selma urged, tapping her cane on the floor without rising. "I'm not up to it."

Cindy Dillon left several patients to take them to the closet, which was really a walk-in storeroom at the far end of the hall, and left them there. There were two racks of clothing and several cardboard boxes full of smaller items, such as scarves and gloves.

"I think this was one of my sister-in-law's coats," Kersh said, taking one from the rack.

Leopold inspected it and felt the lining, but found nothing. "I'm sorry to ask but how serious is your wife's condition? Is she able to walk?"

"Hardly at all. The cane is merely a prop. I assure you, Captain, if she could walk I'd have her home with me."

"What's this?" a voice exclaimed from the doorway. "Who are you?"

"I'm Frank Kersh, Mavis. You remember me. And this is Captain Leopold from the police."

Selma's friend, Mavis Oakes, peered at them through her thick-lensed glasses, then her face relaxed into a smile. "Oh, Frank—how are you?"

"Just fine." He touched a spot of red on her left cheek. "You've still got a dab of clown makeup on your face, Mavis."

She laughed. "I'll have to scrub it off. What are you doing here?"

"We're looking through some costumes," Leopold said. "What were you wearing this morning?" He thought he remembered her in garish colors.

"Cindy made a clown suit for me."

"Did you notice anyone poking around this storeroom?"

"Yes," she answered quite seriously. "You two, just now."

"No one else? How about Ralph Potelli?"

"I don't think so. I don't remember."

After a bit more searching, they closed the door and returned to Selma's room. "Did you find anything?" she asked.

"Nothing," her husband told her. "If there were any other diamonds, they're gone now."

Leopold left them alone. On the way out, he stopped to see Cindy Dillon again. "I was wondering about Selma's condition. Her husband says she can barely walk. Is that correct?"

Cindy shrugged. "Some days she can make it to the bathroom

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with her cane. Other days she never stirs out of bed or out of her chair. We classify her as a wheelchair case."

"Could she have gotten down the hall to Kate Singleton's room?"

"And killed her, you mean? Not a chance. For one thing, Kate must have been strangled between ten and eleven, and that's the hour for Selma's therapy. We have a staff therapist who massages her legs every morning and tries to get her on her feet. He was with her from ten to eleven."

"Did you see them together?"

"Well, no," Cindy admitted. "But Selma's door was closed, I thought he was in there."

"I'll want to talk with him," Leopold decided.

He found the therapist up on the second floor with the male patients and received quick confirmation that he had been with Selma Kersh between ten and eleven that morning. "I was just finishing up when Nurse Dillon found Mrs. Singleton dead," he said.

"What's your name?"

"Eric Fetzner."

Leopold made a note. "You know Ralph?"

"Sure."

"Do you think he could have murdered Mrs. Singleton?"

Fetzner shrugged. "Who knows? I always thought he was okay."

It was dark by the time Leopold returned to Headquarters, and groups of costumed children were already prowling the streets. He stopped for a moment to watch them and was surprised when he heard Sergeant Fletcher call to him from the doorway of the police garage. "They need you upstairs, Captain. All hell's broken loose."

"What is it?"

"Ralph Potelli's dead. He had some sort of seizure while Slater was questioning him."

While Leopold was telling all this to Molly, he'd gotten out of bed and was standing by the window, looking out at the night sky. She came to him now and gently touched his shoulder. "It's hard for you to tell me this, isn't it?"

"I haven't talked about it in twenty-three years."

"You don't have to go on with it, you know."

He watched a cloud drift across the face of the moon. "I think I want to. I think it's time. I'm just afraid you'll hate me."

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Molly put her arms around him, holding him tight. "Do you think, having married you, I'd find it so easy to hate you."

The pressure of her arms gave him the confidence he needed to continue.

The first person Leopold saw as he entered the squad room was Matt Slater. If he'd expected him to look contrite, or frightened, he was wrong. Slater actually greeted him with a grin. "The case is wrapped up. Potelli confessed before he died."

"What?"

"He confessed. He admitted killing the old lady just before he had the attack."

"Was his lawyer present? Did you have a stenographer?"

"No. I was alone with him."

Leopold controlled his rising fury. "Didn't I tell you not to question him any more until his lawyer arrived?"

"I was just—"

"Go on!"

"The lawyer was delayed so I thought I'd give it one more try. He was acting sort of funny, but I figured he was putting me on. Then he had this seizure. The doc says it was an epileptic fit. He was down on the floor and I was trying to help him and that was when he said he killed her."

"You're a liar, Slater! People don't talk in the middle of epileptic fits!"

"Listen, *I* know what I heard!"

"You'll have a chance to tell it to the Internal Affairs Unit. I'm bringing you up on charges."

"For what? For doing my job? For solving the case while you're out chasing your tail?"

"Why would Potelli kill her?" Leopold asked, trying to calm himself.

"For those diamonds, of course."

"How would he have known they were there? And if he did know, why didn't he steal them from the storeroom where the clothes were kept?"

"What do you think happened?"

"I think you bullied Potelli into having a seizure, and when you saw he was dead you made up the story about the confession, figuring it would go easier on you if the dead man was a confessed killer."

"Why are you so sure he didn't kill her?"

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"Because I know who did," Leopold answered. "Come with me and I'll prove it to you."

They drove through the night, hearing the screams of mock fright from the bands of children going door to door for treats. It was warmer than usual for Halloween and Leopold had his window open. Beside him in the front seat, Matt Slater was growing edgy, unsure of himself. "Maybe I heard him wrong," he admitted. "Maybe he wasn't confessing after all."

"Maybe not."

"Look, if I take that back, will you drop the charges? Hell, you know I'm a good cop."

"You're a *lousy* cop, Slater. You always have been. You're too quick to draw your weapon, too quick to lose your temper."

"I get the job done."

"Not this time, you didn't."

He pulled up before a neat little house in a residential area. A block away, a leaf fire was smoldering at the curb, but there were no costumed revelers in sight. "Who lives here?" Slater asked.

"Frank Kersh, Selma Kersh's husband."

Kersh came to the door on the first ring, an open bag of candy in his hand. When he recognized Leopold he backed away, letting the two policemen enter. "What's the trouble now?" he asked.

"I just have a few more questions, Mr. Kersh. This is Sergeant Slater."

Frank Kersh put the candy on a table by the door. He didn't invite them into the living room and they continued to stand awkwardly in the front hallway. "I believe I told you everything I know."

"Not quite. You didn't tell me what you did with the diamonds after you strangled Mrs. Singleton."

"You must be crazy, Captain! I wasn't even at the hospital this morning!"

"You were there, all right. You got there around ten forty-five and you went into Mrs. Singleton's room. She'd just discovered the diamonds hidden in the lining of the old cape Nurse Dillon had given her to wear."

"If I was there, why didn't anyone see me?"

"Because you were wearing a mask," Leopold answered simply. "You'd arrived early for the Halloween party, and if anyone noticed you at all they simply saw a white-haired man in a mask of some sort—one of the male patients from the second floor. At first I won-

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dered why you didn't go directly to your wife's room, but Cindy Dillon answered that one. The therapist was with her and the door was closed. So you went to visit Kate instead. She had just discovered the diamonds hidden in the cape. She might not have shown them to everyone, but you were Selma's husband, after all—the brother-in-law of the woman who'd owned the cape. She must have said she'd give the diamonds to your wife, and that's when you strangled her."

"You're guessing! It's all guesswork!"

"Not quite all, Mr. Kersh. You said the daub of paint on Mavis Oakes' cheek was from her clown makeup. How did you know that unless you were there in the morning to see her? Cindy Dillon told us the costumes were a secret, and your wife didn't have time to tell you about them this afternoon. You said you arrived there just before I arrived."

"All right," Kersh said, nodding suddenly. "You got it pretty near right. When I saw that Selma's door was closed, I poked my head in to see Kate. She showed me the diamonds and said she'd give them to my wife. I couldn't let her do that. Selma would have kept them from me, used them for some foolishness of her own—willed them to that nutty church, probably. But when I pulled that scarf around Kate's neck, I didn't mean to kill her."

"But you did—and you took the diamonds, never feeling in the lining to find the one she'd overlooked. Then you left the same way you'd come in, without seeing your wife. And you returned this afternoon in a different costume, as if you didn't know what had happened."

Frank Kersh nodded again. "It's true, it's all true."

"Where are the diamonds?"

"They were Mildred's. They belonged to her husband. I had to take them because Selma's no longer competent to handle money or valuables."

"Where are they?" Leopold repeated.

"Here—right here in the hall closet." He went over and opened the door.

The diamonds were in a small bag on the high shelf and as Kersh reached it down, they tumbled out onto the floor, scattering across the carpet. Leopold glanced down for just a second, and when he looked up again Frank Kersh was holding an old revolver in his trembling hand.

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Slater reached for his own gun and Leopold shouted, *"Don't shoot, Slater! We can—"*

The sergeant hesitated for an instant, half turning toward Leopold, and the roar of Kersh's gun filled the hallway. Slater jerked backward hard against the wall, blood erupting from his chest.

Leopold leaped forward and knocked the gun from Kersh's hand, but by then it was too late.

"I've never told anyone I shouted at Slater to stop," Leopold said, still staring at the sky. "I've never told anyone I caused his death."

Molly put an arm around him. "You weren't responsible for his death."

"I should have let him pull his gun, even if it meant Kersh's death. Kersh died in prison anyway."

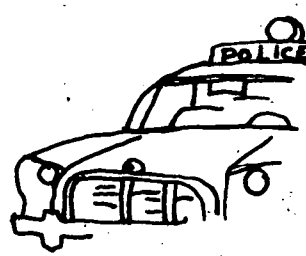
"Slater had caused Potelli's death a few hours earlier. It was natural for you to want to prevent another tragedy."

"It's not my job to save murderers' lives."

"Neither is mine, but I've done it. We're both supposed to see that justice is done, and that's what you were trying to do when you shouted at poor Slater."

"Poor Slater," Leopold repeated, thinking about it.

"Come back to bed now." Molly put her head against his. "Tomorrow's Sunday, and you're off duty. We can both sleep late in the morning."



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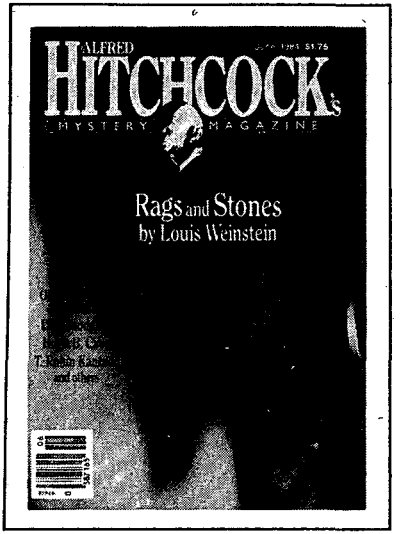

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"I only started writing late in life," Anna Clarke has said, "and should never have done so if a very long and severe illness had not destroyed my chosen career. I should have been a mathematician, and am even now more interested in maths than in fiction. I don't know whether the love of pattern and order and an eye for similarities that form the love of mathematics have any influence on what I write."

Nor do we—but we do know that the stories we receive from Brighton, England, from this talented author are always a very special reading experience . . .

THE SILVER TEAPOT

by ANNA CLARKE

The keys fitted, both the mortice and the Chubb.

So they had not changed the locks. That had been Stella's chief fear after she had made her escape from the Sunset Lodge rest home.

"I'm going to church," she had said to the young care assistant who was left in charge on Sunday afternoons. "I arranged with Matron that I should go to evening service if the weather was fine. It's an easy walk down to the village and I'm sure somebody will give me a lift back."

"Well, if Matron said so," began the girl doubtfully. Matron had told her that Mrs. Stella Ardwick must be carefully watched. She was more active than the other residents, most of whom lay all day slumped in front of their television sets, and she always looked

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elegant and beautiful, since she spent the whole of each morning working on her face and her dress and her hair.

But one must not judge by apearances, said Matron. Mrs. Ardwick's stepson, who had arranged for the old lady to be admitted to Sunset Lodge, had warned them to be on their guard, and the doctor had confirmed that these lapses of memory were becoming more and more frequent. Nothing dangerous, of course. It was fully understood that Sunset Lodge was not equipped to cope with a violent patient. Oh, no. But it was possible that during one of these lapses she might do herself an injury.

"What is your name, my dear?" asked Stella as she noticed the girl's hesitation.

Her manner was a little condescending, but it suited her height and her looks. It was a pleasure to deal with her, thought the girl, after one had done the round of the poor old droopy cabbages in most of the suites.

"Elaine," she replied.

"What a lovely name," said Stella. "I had a great school friend called Elaine."

Two minutes later she had left the premises, having promised Elaine that she would ask somebody to call her a taxi if she did not get a lift.

The next danger spot had been the churchyard. Stella approached it by the narrow footpath between the beech hedges, which very few people used because most of them came by car, as she herself had always done in the old days. This was accomplished safely, and then she stationed herself in the shelter of one of the huge old yew trees for which the village church was famous and watched the evening worshipers converge upon the church. It was a pleasant and cheerful scene on a fine summer evening, but Stella, who up till that moment had felt calm and confident, was stirred by memories that threatened her composure. There had been a time when she herself had been among those innocent, chattering churchgoers, with Hugh at her side, straight and healthy then, not the trembling, tyrannical wreck he had been in those dreadful last years.

But she must not think of that now or she would never accomplish her purpose.

The last of the latecomers disappeared beneath the Norman arch of the porch and Stella came out of her hiding-place and walked across the grass to the lych-gate. The bus stop was a few yards to the right, and a bus was due shortly. She had discovered this by

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chatting with the cleaning woman at Sunset Lodge, who had been surprised but pleased that one of the residents should be interested in her own difficulties of getting to and from work.

The bus was nearly empty and the driver barely looked at Stella as he took the fare. He was obviously in a hurry to go off duty because they raced along the Ocean Road, and Stella was afraid they would race past the stop. But a sudden thickening of the traffic slowed them down and then all that remained was the walk up the steep hill that led to "The Ridings" and to nowhere else.

Their own private road. And all around the house was open grassland. Nobody could come near without being seen from one of the windows. It was an isolated spot, but in some ways a secure one. Anybody trying to approach under cover of darkness would set the dogs barking.

Angus and Bridie. Two black Labradors. Stella had a moment's fear while she wondered whether they would remember her, but as she pushed at the heavy wrought-iron gates they came running up, leaping and barking their welcome.

Loose in the garden. That meant there was nobody at home, as she had calculated. Geoffrey and Lena would be playing bridge with the Gordons. This was a ritual that nothing, not even Hugh's death, had ever been allowed to disturb. Otherwise Hugh might not have died—or at any rate, not just at that moment.

They had not changed the locks after they had had Stella put away in the rest home and taken over the house themselves. That had been careless of them, but then they didn't know that she had managed to hold onto a spare set of keys. It was on that terrible day soon after Hugh's funeral. Or was it a long time after? It worried her to try to remember.

She pushed open the door and the dogs came bounding into the house with her. Inside the spacious foyer it felt cool and dim, and suddenly she was very faint and weak. There ought to be an armchair somewhere here to the left, into which Hugh had collapsed the moment he came in, those last months when the disease was gripping and shaking him with its giant hand.

He had sat and smoked. One cigarette after another. It was the only thing that seemed to ease him. The smoking and the strong tea. And in the end they had combined to kill him and to leave her free at last after all those years of slavery and pretense.

Stella found the chair and lay back in it with closed eyes and with

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the dogs, quiet now, at her feet. Memories came and went with sudden vividness and equally sudden dissolution, like the happenings in a dream. Herself at the piano in the long drawing room, lost in the cool sweetness of a Chopin nocturne. And then Hugh's voice:

"Have you gone deaf? Didn't you hear me come in? I'm tired and I want some tea. You've got all day to strum in. I've a good mind to get rid of that damned piano."

And after the disease had gripped him he would hit out with his stick, at Stella herself, at the visiting nurse, and at the dogs, so that in the end they ceased to greet him, and when his trembling hand at last gripped the cup or the wine glass he would throw it, as in a child's tantrum, against the wall or onto the floor.

Violence and self-pity. And his son Geoffrey was even worse. The weak spot, when they turned Stella out of her house, had been Lena. A silly, pretty creature, but it had naturally fallen to her to pack Stella's things for the removal to the rest home. Stella, weak and confused though she had then been, still had thought to tuck that spare set of keys down into the toe of a shoe before it was packed, and Lena didn't notice. So when they had searched her handbag—"to check that she had everything she needed," they said—they had found no keys.

And here she was, back at "The Ridings" again, after so many weeks—or was it months?—away. But she was very tired after her exertions, and even when she had managed to fight off the memories of Hugh she couldn't remember why she had come, although she knew it was very important to remember. There was some unfinished business here—she had been worrying about it for a long time. It was something connected with Hugh's death.

Stella opened her eyes and looked down at the dark, adoring faces of the dogs. They had been lying in just that position on the day Hugh died. And he had been sitting opposite, in the crimson winged chair, with the coffee table by his side, and on it the heavy glass ashtray brimming over with cigarette ends. And by her side was the tea trolley, with scones and a fruit cake—and the Meissen tea service with the odd-shaped milk jug. And the silver teapot.

Of course. That was it. The silver teapot. It was not particularly beautiful or particularly valuable, but it had belonged to her mother and she was fond of it. It was the only thing of her very own Hugh had allowed her to keep and use, and out of its spout had come the dark-brown liquid that had released Hugh from the disease and freed Stella from Hugh.

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She had come back here, after all these weeks and with such very great effort, because she had to make sure that there wasn't the slightest trace of that liquid remaining in the teapot.

On the day Hugh died she had thoroughly washed the cups and saucers and plates—and the milk jug, too. The tea-leaves and the remaining liquid had been poured down the sink and rinsed away with much water. Then she had rinsed out the teapot, scrubbed the inside of it with a pot scourer, and rinsed it again.

And again and again and again.

She had even used it for making tea, and had poured herself out a cup and drunk it with no ill effects. And the doctor had signed the death certificate for Hugh, stating that the disease had caused his death.

Nobody had the slightest suspicion, not even Geoffrey, who had hated his father's wife but had not loved his father—and who had inherited his father's house and most of his estate after the death. So in fact Stella had helped Geoffrey, although she had not known she was doing so. Hugh had promised to leave her the house. But even after his death, he had cheated her and left her homeless. She had never, until then, realized that he had come to hate her as much as she him. But he had tormented her for years, while she had had only her one brief moment of triumph. It was intolerable. It was unbearably unjust.

Tears filled her eyes. She got up from the chair and the dogs jumped up, barking with hope. Bridie leapt up at her and she lost her balance and fell against a little table, knocking it over into the fireplace and shattering the vase that had been standing on it.

Stella held onto the mantelpiece and stared down at the fragments of blue Wedgewood china that lay in the grate. They seemed to be trying to tell her something.

"Of course!" she cried aloud. "That's what I've come for!"

With both hands, which still wore the white gloves she had put on with her churchgoing costume, she picked up Hugh's old walking stick, the heavy oak one he had hung onto until the day he died, and she hit out with it, just as Hugh had hit out. But not at the dogs. She hit at the Staffordshire figures on the mantelpiece, and the rest of the Wedgewood vases, and at the wine glasses in the corner cupboard, and at everything she could find.

And when she had finished in the foyer, she went into the drawing room and hit out at everything there, too. And then into the dining room, and then the kitchen. Everywhere there was the sound of

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crashing glass and porcelain, and the dogs ran ahead, barking and jumping as if to say, "Come on! On with the fun!"

When she had finished in the kitchen, she found that Angus and Bridie had raced upstairs, but at the sight of the wide polished wooden steps Stella suddenly felt overcome with tiredness and could do no more. She dropped the stick onto the edge of the fender where it had lain before and gripped the mantelpiece to steady herself.

It was as if she was coming out of a faint, as if the last quarter of an hour had never been.

"There's a bus at a quarter to six," she muttered to herself. "I can just catch it."

She opened the front door and the dogs ran out into the garden and crouched by the side of the hedge, either side of the front gates, in their guard positions.

The door slammed behind her and she remembered to lock the mortice lock before replacing the keys in her purse.

"Goodbye, Angus and Bridie," she said to the Labradors as she looked back at them through the wrought-iron gates. "It was nice to see you again."

In the bus she fell asleep. She would have missed her stop if the driver hadn't called out its name. The village street was deserted—all the cars that had been parked 'round the churchyard were gone.

Elaine, said Stella to herself. That's the girl's name. I told her I'd get a lift back from church, but I can't. There's nobody left. Perhaps the new vicar . . .

The vicarage was a plain, red-brick house just around the corner from the bus stop.

Stella rang the bell and a cheerful young woman opened the door.

"I'm very sorry to trouble you," said Stella, "but I wonder whether you could kindly call me a taxi? I live at Sunset Lodge, and I came down to evening service, but after a while I felt rather faint and I came out and sat on the bench beneath the big yew tree and I'm afraid I must have fallen asleep. I really don't feel up to walking up the hill . . ."

It's a risk, she thought as she was speaking. Supposing they saw me get off the bus?

But they hadn't seen her. The girl turned out to be the wife of the new vicar and she was most sympathetic.

"I'll drive you home myself," she said. "Just a minute while I ask Peter to keep an eye on the oven . . ."

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They arrived at Sunset Lodge at the same time as the Matron. The vicar's wife introduced herself and said she would be delighted to arrange for Mrs. Ardwick to be driven to and from church whenever she wanted to come.

Stella could see Matron hastily readjusting her face as she replied that that was very kind. It was as if Stella herself no longer existed as a person. She was a parcel, an object that needed transporting. That was all.

But it didn't matter now. She had done what she wanted to do, and nobody would ever know.

She took off her hat and gloves and sat down in the chair by the window, seeing nothing, thinking of nothing, but feeling quite calm and contented.

Time passed. A knock came at the door and Elaine appeared with a tray on which was a cup of coffee and a large cardboard box. She seemed to be rather excited about something.

"Oh, Mrs. Ardwick," she cried, "I'm most terribly sorry! This parcel was brought for you yesterday afternoon, and I ought to have given it to you before, but I've been very busy and I forgot all about it."

Stella smiled graciously and thanked her for the coffee.

"And there's something else, too," went on Elaine. "There was a phone call just now from a lady who said she was Mrs. Ardwick—Mrs. Lena Ardwick—and she asked me to give you a message."

"Yes?" said Stella without much interest. She was very tired indeed now, and nothing seemed to matter at all.

"She's sorry she won't be able to come to visit you next week as she had hoped, but they've had a burglary—a really dreadful burglary."

"Oh? Have they?" said Stella indifferently. What does it matter to me, she said to herself, whether Goeffrey and Lena get burgled or not?

Elaine was disappointed at receiving no reaction. "I expect you're tired after going to church," she said. "I'll leave you in peace. You must ring if you want anything."

Stella managed a weary smile as the girl left the room, and then she sat for a while staring out at the twilight with unseeing eyes. When at last she got up, she felt her foot touch something hard. It was a big square cardboard box. Stella frowned as she bent down to take off the lid. Beneath the tissue paper there was a glint of metal. Bright shining metal. Silver.

With her heart suddenly racing, she pulled aside the wrapping

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paper and placed the teapot on her lap. How had it got here? Had she brought it here herself?

It was impossible to remember. All she could think of was that it had to be rinsed out to remove all traces of the nicotine, the brown liquid nicotine that the farmers used to kill insect pests. She took the teapot into her bathroom and ran water through it again and again until she was so tired she could no longer stand. Then she returned to her chair by the window and sat with the teapot on her lap, crying quietly and hopelessly.

She ought to throw it away, but she was too tired to think how to do it. All she could do was wrap it up in the paper again and put it back in the box and put the box at the bottom of the closet and hope nobody would ever look inside it. But as she unfolded the soft paper she found that there was a white envelope tucked down at the side of the box.

In the envelope was a letter in a sprawling, sloping handwriting.

"Dear Stella," it ran, "I've been meaning for ages to send you your silver teapot. I know it's your own and that you are fond of it. I'm so sorry to be so long in getting it to you, but we've been terribly busy moving into 'The Ridings,' and you know how impatient Geoffrey gets if everything isn't perfect at once.

"I was going to bring this with me if I came to see you next week, but some friends of ours are driving over your way this afternoon and they offered to drop it in at Sunset Lodge.

"Please forgive me for being so long in letting you have your teapot.

"In fact, I'm so very sorry about everything and wish I could help, but you know how it is with Geoffrey. Anyway, I do understand. I do truly understand.

"Affectionately, Lena."

Lena Ardwick. Silly, pretty little Lena. She had guessed Stella's secret. She knew about the teapot and what it had contained, and she was trying, in her sloppy roundabout way, to tell Stella that she wouldn't let her down.

The relief was so great that Stella hardly knew how to bear it. Lena would never let her down. There was no need to get rid of the teapot now. It could stand on her dressing-table and the nurses would bring her some polish to keep it shining and she would see it every day and she need never rinse it out again.

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Stella sat with the teapot and Lena's letter in her lap and the tears running down her face. Oh, thank you, Lena!

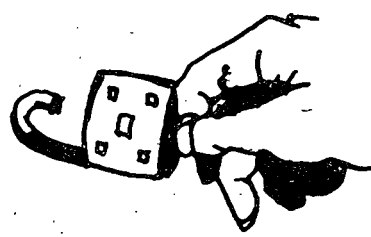
And then a memory stirred—something Lena herself had omitted to do. Of course. The keys. Well, Lena had helped her, so she would help Lena. If Geoffrey found out that Lena's carelessness had enabled Stella to smuggle out the keys, Lena's life wouldn't be worth living. So the keys must be hidden—forever.

Stella thought for a while and then smiled to herself. The silver teapot had kept one secret very well: why shouldn't it keep another?

She took the spare set of keys for "The Ridings" out of her purse and wrapped them in tissue paper. Then she took the lid off the teapot and felt 'round the base of the spout with her long forefinger. It didn't matter blocking up the spout, since the pot was never to be used again. The keys wedged themselves very neatly into the aperture. You could shake the teapot really hard and they didn't shift or rattle.

Stella reached for the bell. "Elaine," she would say when the girl appeared, "wasn't it nice of my stepson's wife to send on my teapot? I am so fond of it. I think when my time comes I should like it to be buried with me—like the ancient Egyptians, you know, my dear."

Such a little thing to ask. Nobody would have the heart to deny her that.



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a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

The wooden table and three straight chairs were scratched beyond refinishing, the two-burner hotplate dangerously greasy, chintz curtains heavy with dust, floor linoleum patchy with age. On one of two folding cots in a tiny sleeping alcove, the kid's father, Lew McCulla, slept an open-mouthed, alcoholic sleep. On the floor next to his cot were an open bottle of Old Crow and a closed clarinet case.

Yet another poignant story to give evidence to Clark Howard's exceptional observations of, insights into, and concern for people, old and young, weak and strong, evil and good . . .

McCULLA'S KID

by CLARK HOWARD

Old Rainey found McCulla's kid in a drugstore on Royal Street, buying brown polish to restock his shoeshine box.

"Whar' yo' daddy at?" Rainey asked him.

"Sleeping," McCulla's kid said.

"I done knocked on the door," Rainey said. "Didn't get no answer."

The kid glanced away. "Sometimes he sleeps pretty sound."

I'll bet he do, Rainey thought. 'Specially when he's drunk. Rainey bent his old black face next to the white boy's ear. He didn't have far to bend—he'd been walking with a stoop since he was seventy. "I wants you to come unlock the door for me," he told the boy, "so's I can wake him up. Mr. Gaston wants to talk to him over at the Hall right away."

The "Hall" was Tradition Hall, the most famous jazz club in the Vieux Carré, the French Quarter of New Orleans. Mr. Gaston was

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its owner. McCulla's kid knew that if Mr. Gaston was sending for his dad, it must be important.

"Sure, I'll let you in," the boy said to old Rainey. He paid for his tin of polish, slung his shine box over one shoulder, and he and Rainey left. They walked up Royal to Pirate's Alley, then cut over past the cathedral to Jackson Square. Though early, the morning already promised a mugginess that would drive everyone, even the tourists, indoors by three o'clock. As they walked, they had little to say, this old black man and the young white boy, who was twelve. They didn't know each other well, the boy and his father having returned to the Quarter from Kansas City less than a month earlier after a long absence.

Rainey and the boy made an odd pair as they moved along: the old man bent and white-haired with age, shuffling as he walked, pursing his lips and occasionally muttering some complaint against the world in general; the boy tanned, his hair bleached yellow by the sun, blue eyes bright but not young, mouth set. They walked through Jackson Square, where several artists were already setting up their easels, and turned down Decatur.

"What you get for a shoeshine, boy?" old Rainey asked.

"Half a dollar," the kid answered.

"Half a dollar!" Rainey said indignantly. "Why, when *I* was a boy shining on this here very street, we didn't get but a *nickel.* And that was for mostly *boots,* too. A nickel. That was all."

McCulla's kid shrugged his shoulders. "Half a dollar," he repeated. He wouldn't *spit* for a nickel.

In the middle of the first block on Decatur, the kid and Rainey turned into a narrow passageway between the two front buildings and went through to a rear building separated by a garden—or what had once been a garden. When the rear building had been the three-story townhouse of a wealthy upriver plantation family, the plot between the two buildings had been outrageous with crape myrtles, magnolias, camellias, redbuds, and a dozen other species of cultivated flowers that flourished in the moist semitropical air. In the cool of the evening, it had been a place to sit and take in fragrances and contemplate blessings. But since the townhouse had become a collection of sleeping rooms and kitchenettes, and its tenants the kind to whom the garden was just something through which to pass to get to the street, it had, like the townhouse, fallen on hard times and been reduced to a state of dismal neglect. Where once had

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bloomed vibrantly hued flowers, there was now displayed only empty beer cans, cigarette butts, and an occasional item even more gross.

The kid and old Rainey went up a flight of outside stairs and along a balcony to a door with 2-C painted on it by an amateur hand. The kid unlocked the door and Rainey followed him inside. It was a bare, seedy little place with no signs of pride. The wooden table and three straight chairs were scratched beyond refinishing, the two-burner hotplate dangerously greasy, chintz curtains heavy with dust, floor linoleum patchy with age. On one of two folding cots in a tiny sleeping alcove, the kid's father, Lew McCulla, slept an open-mouthed, alcoholic sleep. On the floor next to his cot were an open bottle of Old Crow and a closed clarinet case.

Old Rainey started for the sleeping man, but the kid cut him off. "I'll do it," he said, and Rainey could tell by his eyes that it was not open to discussion. Unslinging the shine box, the kid dropped to his knees next to the cot and began shaking his sleeping father. "Lew," he said. "Come on, Lew, wake up—"

Lew McCulla came out of it slowly and reluctantly, struggling for focus, fighting the taste in his mouth, testing his limbs one at a time for response. When the groping man got up as far as one elbow, the kid took the bottle and went over to the hotplate. Lighting the burner, he set a dented coffeepot over the spurts of blue flame and washed out a cup. Rainey watched all this with great, frowning interest, still fascinated after three-quarters of a century by some of the white man's mores.

"Give me a drink, kid," Lew McCulla said raspily from the cot.

"Only with some coffee," the kid said.

"Goddamnit, bring me that bottle!"

"With some coffee," the kid repeated firmly. Glancing over at his father, he decided how strong the coffee had to be. Some days were light—just hot, black coffee. Some were medium, with a spoonful of chicory. Some were heavy, after a real binge: two spoonfuls of chicory. Today Lew McCulla looked like medium would put him on his feet. The kid got down the jar of ground chicory and measured one spoonful.

"What's he doing here?" McCulla asked the kid when he realized Rainey was in the room.

"Come to get you. Mr. Gaston sent him."

McCulla squinted quizzically at Rainey. "I do something wrong last night? He fixing to fire me?"

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Rainey shrugged. "Ah don't know nothin' 'cept he want you over dere."

McCulla began muttering an obscenity-laced soliloquy on the inequities of poor memory and early rising. The kid mixed a shot of whiskey in the cup of coffee and took it to him. "Hot," he warned.

"I'm not blind or stupid," McCulla said. "I can see the steam." He tried to take a sip and burned his lips. "Son of a bitch!"

"Ain't blind and ain't stupid," old Rainey muttered. "Wonder what the problem be, den."

The kid ignored the old black man's comment. He had learned long ago, when he was eight or nine, that if he defended against every slur cast at his father, he'd spend a good part of his life fighting. Sitting on the floor, he opened his shoeshine box and uncapped the new tin of brown polish to mix a little water with it for easier spreading. It would, he knew, take Lew twenty minutes to start independent functioning. Then the kid could get back out on the streets of the Vieux Carré and start making some money.

Mr. Gaston's office, upstairs over Tradition Hall, made no concession at all to current times. The desk lamp had a shield of antique green glass, there was a spindle instead of an Out box, there were a fountain-pen and inkwell, and on the wall there was a 1935 calendar, which matched identically the 1985 calendar, but which Gaston liked better because it featured a photograph of Dolores Del Rio.

The dapper club owner, who in his time had been everything from a bootlegger to a bookmaker, placed the tips of his manicured fingers together and studied Lew McCulla with unblinking eyes. McCulla was one of the best pure Dixieland clarinetists Gaston had ever heard—and Gaston had heard them all. He had heard Louis Cottrell, Jr. play the "Bogalusa Strut" with the Young Tuxedoes back in the 1930s, heard Jimmy Hartwell play with Bix's Wolverines when they did "Jazz Me Blues" in Richmond, Indiana, in 1924, and heard the legendary Jimmy Noone, the greatest communicative clarinetist in history, at the Apex Club in Chicago where Earl Hines was a young piano player. Hell, he had even heard Sidney Celestine once for a few minutes. Lew McCulla was as good as any of them—or would have been if he ever stayed sober two days running. McCulla, as far as Gaston knew, was the last of the Albert System clarinetists, still using the old-time, differently constructed and fingered instrument that so faithfully captured the pure New Orleans sound. *Why,* Gaston wondered, did the Great Dixieland Bandleader in the Sky send

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him such an outstanding talent, and then attach so many strings to him? It was bad enough that McCulla had a kid that the truant officers were always after because he refused to go to school, and bad enough that the only time McCulla didn't have a bottle to his lips was when the clarinet mouthpiece was there, but now Gaston found himself faced with still another problem.

"Two guys," he told McCulla in the same neutral tone he used for every occasion from ardor to death threats, "big, ugly guys. Down from Kansas City. They say you owe Calder Lingle some money. And that you skipped out. Calder sent them down here to cripple you."

McCulla sighed a deep, weary sigh and leaned forward, elbows on knees. Gaston could see perspiration emerge on the surface of his forehead.

"How much do you owe him?"

"Eight."

"I'll let you have it and take it back a hundred a week for two months, no interest."

McCulla was already shaking his head. "Not eight hundred. Eight *grand.*"

Gaston and old Rainey, who was waiting by the door, exchanged incredulous looks. Eight *thousand?* "I don't believe it," Gaston said.

"Believe it," McCulla urged.

"How in the hell—?"

"Don't ask. The horses. Cards. A woman named Lila Mae. The booze." He glanced from Gaston to Rainey and back, helpless and embarrassed. "Life just got away from me. I couldn't get a handle on anything."

Now it was Gaston's turn to sigh wearily. "Well, I can't stake you to eight grand—money's too tight right now. But I can let you have enough for you and the kid to split. If you want to head down Galveston way, I have a friend who owns a small jazz club there."

But again Lew McCulla was shaking his head. "I can't leave New Orleans right now. The woodwinds committee from the Jazz Hall of Fame will be in town tonight to listen to me play. I'm one of the three finalists this year. I've got a chance to be voted into the Hall of Fame."

"I don't think you quite understand," Gaston said slowly. "There's a committee of two down here from Kansas City that wants to vote you into an intensive-care unit. You've got to leave New Orleans."

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"I can't." McCulla wet his lips. "You remember my wife, Mr. Gaston? Her name was Edie."

Gaston nodded. Edie had been the daughter of a tenor-sax player with the Fudge Ripples, one of the first integrated Dixieland bands. Like McCulla himself, she had grown up in the Vieux Carré—the sounds of Dixieland had been her bedtime lullaby. At sixteen she got pregnant by Lew McCulla, who was then twenty, and her father threatened to kill them. They ran off to one of those Southern states where the age of consent is twelve, got married, and gravitated up the muddy Mississip to Memphis, where Lew found clarinet work on Beale Street. Their baby came—a boy—and Edie began a campaign of sending her daddy pictures of him every month. After two years, the old man forgave them and they moved back to New Orleans. For the next four years they lived an idyllic life. Then Edie started having headaches. She thought it was eye strain and got reading glasses. The headaches continued. She took aspirin. Then aspirin and codeine. Then Demerol. Finally she checked into a hospital. By that time the brain tumor causing the headaches was inoperable.

After Edie's death, Lew McCulla left New Orleans and wandered around the South, playing here, playing there, never staying in one place very long, beginning to drink a lot. He played in beer bars and roadhouses and dance clubs in places with names like Hattiesburg, Tuscaloosa, and Waycross, always dragging the kid along with him, letting him grow up in diners, pool halls, bus depots. Sometimes the kid got in a full month of school somewhere before they moved on, sometimes not. He learned to read a little, spell a little, make change, and lie a lot. Along the line his eyes turned hard and he became a survivor. He watched his father play the clarinet so often that he knew every finger movement of every Dixieland standard that Lew McCulla played, yet he would never touch the instrument. He told his father he didn't like music. It was actually the musician's life, the way his father lived it, that he didn't like.

Most people who were associated with Dixieland in the Vieux Carré knew the story of Lew McCulla and his kid, and remembered Edie McCulla. A roundy, smiling, effervescent girl, she had liked everyone and everyone had liked her. Gaston remembered her well.

"What's she got to do with you not being able to leave New Orleans?" he asked McCulla.

Lew wet his lips. "I'm not sure you'll understand this, but, see, Edie was very proud of my playing. She thought the music I made

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with my clarinet was the most beautiful sound in the world. She wanted the kid to be a musician someday, too. I used to tell her, what if he don't want to? What if he wants to be something else? But she always said, 'Just make him proud of you, Lew. Do that and he'll want to be just like you.' "

Gaston began to understand. "You think making the Jazz Hall of Fame will do it?"

McCulla shrugged. "It's worth a try. Nothing else has ever worked." He looked down at the floor. "I'm not much of an example any other way."

Gaston was silent for a moment. Then he asked, "When were you nominated?"

"Three months ago. Even with all the problems up in K.C., I still managed to work steady. I played with Rick Ellsworth's band at the Blue River Club. That's where the woodwinds nominating committee caught me. They had a list of twelve guys who'd been in the business for at least ten years, which is a requirement. During the last few months, they've narrowed the list down to three."

"Who you up against?"

"Grover Washington, Jr., and Zoot Sims."

"That's heavy competition."

A hint of a smile came to Lew McCulla's lips. It was a smile that said he knew how good he was. "If you don't think I've got a chance," he told Gaston, "I'll go ahead and split."

"Don't get cute with me, McCulla," the older man said. "You know you're good enough to win, and you know *I* know it. Question is, can you stay out of the hospital long enough to win?"

"I got to try, Mr. Gaston," Lew said, all pretense gone now. "For Edie, I got to try."

Gaston and old Rainey exchanged looks again. They had known each other for thirty years and their minds usually reached the same conclusions, though frequently for different reasons. Right now they were thinking: *trouble*. Gaston was blaming one thing: *musicians*. Old Rainey another: *white folks*. But both knew they would help Lew McCulla however they could. He was part of the Quarter, and so were they. That meant something.

"Maybe," Gaston said, "we can let the Hall of Fame committee hear you and still get you out of town. Where's the committee staying?"

"The Royal Orleans. They're coming to Tradition Hall at eight for the first set."

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"The two guys from Kansas City will be here for the first set, too. We've got to fix it so you won't be here." Gaston reached for an old-fashioned black telephone, lifted the receiver, and jiggled the hook. "Get me Virgil's on Basin Street," he told his switchboard operator. A moment later he said, "Virgil, this is Gaston. You've got Peanuts Kenner playing clarinet with your bunch over there, right? Okay, here's what I want you to do. Send Peanuts over here to play tonight and let my clarinetist Lew McCulla sit in with your guys. We're trying to keep McCulla away from some outsiders who're after him."

The word "outsiders" always worked magic in the Quarter: Virgil agreed at once. When Gaston hung up, he said to old Rainey, "Get over to the Royal Orleans and tell the Hall of Fame committee McCulla will be at Virgil's on Basin Street instead of here."

As soon as Rainey left, Gaston took two hundred dollars out of his pocket and handed it to McCulla. "Soon's those committee people hear you, take the kid and split for Galveston. My friend's place is the Lone Star Club, on the Strand. I'll call him."

"Thanks, Mr. Gaston," McCulla said, sheepish and ashamed. "I owe you."

Watching McCulla leave, Gaston thought, Sure, sure—you and a hundred other ragtimers. One thing Gaston had learned over the years was that Dixieland musicians never paid their debts. As a group, they were probably the most irresponsible people who ever walked upright. Absolutely worthless. Their only redeeming value, as far as Gaston was concerned, was that they played the sweetest music this side of heaven.

The two apes from Kansas City came back to Gaston's office at five past eight, just after Tradition Hall's first set had begun. One ape watched while one talked.

"Like I tol' you earlier, Mr. Gaston, we represent Mr. Calder Lingle of Kansas City. Mr. Lingle sent us after this licorice-stick player named McCulla that welched on a bundle of dough. We come down here to learn him a lesson. He's supposed to be playing at your joint, but he ain't here. We need to find him. Mr. Lingle tol' us you'd cooperate."

"I'll see what I can do," Gaston said. He picked up a small brass servant's bell and shook it several times. The two apes exchanged dubious glances. Presently, a woman of about forty with a Rubenesque figure, wearing a 1920s shimmy dress, came in. Gaston asked about McCulla.

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"He's sick," the woman replied, as rehearsed. "From the booze, most likely. We got a replacement from the union hall."

"Get me his address," Gaston instructed. The woman left and returned a moment later with McCulla's address on Decatur. It was the actual address—with Calder Lingle involved, Gaston had to make his cooperation look legitimate. "You can probably catch him at home," he said, handing over the address. "Let me know if there's anything else I can do." The head ape thanked him. As they were leaving, Gaston said to the woman, loudly enough for them to hear, "Tell the union hall we'll need a permanent replacement clarinetist as soon as possible."

At Virgil's on Basin Street, the first set of the evening began with "Dippermouth Blues," and without pause went into "Panama" and "Sweet Lorraine." The Hall of Fame committee had not arrived. Virgil, the club owner, and old Rainey, who had been sent by Gaston to fill him in on the story, stood off to the side of the bandstand, watching the front door.

"You sure they got the message that McCulla would be playing here instead of over at Tradition?" Virgil asked. Old Rainey nodded emphatically.

"I deliver dat message myself. Dey be along." He turned and started to shuffle away.

"Where you going?"

"Over to where he live," Rainey said, bobbing his chin at McCulla. "Mr. Gaston, he be sending dem thugs over dere. He want me to make sure de boy ain't around."

"Boy? Oh, McCulla's kid."

"Dat's right," Rainey replied. He shuffled around behind the bandstand and out the back door.

McCulla's kid was at the scarred old table in the little apartment on Decatur, eating pork and beans from an open can and saltine crackers from a box, drinking Dr. Pepper, and counting his money. He had, all in change, four dollars and twenty cents, representing seven shines that afternoon, plus tips. As he ate, he neatly stacked the money on the table—nickels, dimes, quarters, and halves. In a little dime-store spiral notebook he used a pencil stub to enter $3.20 after a column of figures that covered half the pages in the book. Carefully adding that entry to the last figure, he wrote a new total: $612.60. Then he put the book and all but one dollar in change into

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a LeMoyne Coffee can on a shelf under the hotplate. The can already contained nearly ten dollars that he had put in it since the week began. Every Friday he took the money to the Louisiana Bank on Canal Street and deposited it in a savings account. He had been saving for almost a year. In another nine months, he hoped to have one thousand dollars saved. Then he was going to put Lew in the Chelsea Hills Sanitarium and have him cured of the booze.

With the coffee can back on the shelf, the kid returned to the table and finished his solitary supper. From an open window of the apartment he could hear Dixieland music begin playing as the first set started at the Ursuline Club around the corner. The opening number was "Sweet Sue." The kid had watched Lew play that number a hundred times over the years. Closing his eyes, he pictured a clarinet with fingers moving exactly as they should to produce each note perfectly.

As the kid ate, the unseen band moved into "Davenport Blues," which Hoagy Carmichael had written in tribute to Bix Beiderbecke, and then into "Lonesome Road," which opened with a long, lugubrious clarinet solo. "Lonesome Road," the kid knew, had been his mother's favorite song. The kid's grandfather, before he died, had told him that. He had told the kid many stories about Edie, mostly of her as a little girl growing up in the Vieux Carré. The old man's stories had made the Quarter sound like some wonderland filled with happy music being played by and for special people. The kid knew differently. The Quarter was a dark, shadowy place where you had to scratch for every dime you made, and where there was always someone lurking about looking to take it from you. When the kid had his thousand dollars saved, and got Lew cured of the booze, he hoped they could leave New Orleans and never return.

Finishing his supper, the kid tossed the pork-and-beans and Dr. Pepper cans into a sack under the sink, rinsed off his spoon, and carefully closed the waxed paper to keep the crackers from going stale. Slinging his shine box, he left the apartment and went downstairs, trying to decide where to work that night. Most of the nighttime tourists headed for Bourbon Street, which was closed to vehicular traffic at night and became a kind of tourist mall, but the tough black kids had decided that Bourbon was theirs—white shoeshine boys caught there had their shine boxes smashed and their money taken. The kid decided to try Bienville Street, where the whores hung out. Lots of times a john would let you give him a shine while he was looking over the parade of flesh.

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As the kid was passing through the garden, he saw a figure in the greyness of the areaway leading to the street. Instinctively, he reached into his back pocket where he carried a switchblade.

"It's me boy," old Rainey said. "Lea' that blade be."

"What do you want?" McCulla's kid asked.

"I brang a message from yo' daddy. He say tell you he ain't at Tradition tonight—he settin' in at Virgil's on Basin Street instead."

"Okay," the kid said. It wasn't unusual—Dixieland musicians often traded chairs for an evening. It was a break from the routine of playing in the same house night after night.

"Whar' you going to now?" Rainey asked.

"Iberville Street," the kid lied. He didn't like anyone knowing where he was.

"I'se going to Toulouse," Rainey said. "I walk wid you dat far."

"Suit yourself," the kid said.

They went off down the street together.

The two apes from Kansas City passed the old black man and the boy on their way to the address Gaston had given them. They went through the garden, found the right apartment, and shouldered the door open without even knocking. The building manager heard the noise and came to investigate.

"We're looking for Lew McCulla," the ape that talked said. "We're cops."

"Jeez, did you have to break the lock?" the manager complained. "Are you sure you're cops?"

"Positive." The ape reached into his pocket and the manager thought he was going to produce a badge. Instead he handed the manager a fifty.

"Have the lock fixed and keep the change. Can you tell us where McCulla is? He called in sick at work."

"Jeez, I don't know," the manager said with a frown. "He left at his usual time, carrying his clarinet case like always. You sure he ain't at Tradition Hall?"

"Positive. Any idea where he might have gone?"

"Jeez, no. His kid might know, but you just missed him. He left a couple of minutes ago with his shoeshine box. You might catch him on the street."

The apes exchanged looks, remembering the kid and the old man they had just passed. They hurried back out and started looking up and down Decatur Street . . .

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At Virgil's on Basin Street, the Jazz Hall of Fame woodwinds committee arrived at twenty of nine.

"Center table in the back, just like you requested on the phone, gentlemen," Virgil said, escorting them across the club. "I was beginning to think you weren't coming."

"We always arrive late," one of the trio said. "It gives the musician we've come to see time to warm up. We don't feel it's fair to listen to a cold instrument."

"That's what I call very considerate," Virgil said, impressed. He himself was a musician. It was obvious to him that these men understood what playing was all about. Virgil snapped his fingers for a waiter. "Bring these gentlemen anything they want," he instructed, "and give the check to me."

Virgil retreated to his office and telephoned Gaston. "They're finally here," he told the Tradition Hall owner.

In his office, Gaston snapped open an old-fashioned pocket watch. Looking at the time, he knew Virgil's band would be on their first break of the evening. "What's their lead-in on the second set?" he inquired.

Virgil thought for a second, then replied, " 'Snake Rag,' 'High Society,' and 'Savoy Blues.' "

"Have them substitute 'Muskrat Ramble' for 'Snake Rag,' " Gaston suggested. "It's a more familiar piece and the gentlemen on the committee will be able to identify with it more easily. It has a better clarinet part for McCulla, too."

Virgil agreed. After hanging up, he went into the alley where the band took its break and made the change in the program. None of the musicians questioned it—they assumed it was a request from one of the customers. Before Virgil could go back inside, Lew McCulla came over to him.

"They here yet?"

"They're here."

Virgil went back into the club. McCulla leaned up against the bricks of the building and started to take a drink from a pint bottle in a paper bag. Then he thought of the committee. And of Edie. He wanted the drink very badly. But there was something he wanted more: his name in the Jazz Hall of Fame. For the kid.

Closing the bottle, he put it back in his coat pocket.

The apes from Kansas City searched up and down Decatur, Ursuline, St. Philip, and Chartres Streets, but couldn't find McCulla's

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kid or the old black man with whom they'd seen him. The one that talked cursed and they went looking for a pay phone to call Kansas City. They found one near the Café du Monde across from Jackson Square.

"Mr. Lingle," the one ape said when the call got through, "that licorice-stick player ain't working tonight and ain't in his apartment. So far we ain't leaned on nobody to find him 'cause you said no strongarm except on McCulla hisself. You want we should just hang around or what?"

"Hang on a minute," Calder Lingle said in a raspy voice at the other end. The ape heard him say to someone in his office, "Get Kid Benoit in here." Kid Benoit, the ape knew, was the leader of the jazz band at the club were Lingle had his office. Several moments later, the ape heard Lingle say, "Kid, what was it you were telling us earlier about some jazz committee being in New Orleans to hear McCulla play?" The ape heard Benoit's voice in the distant background but couldn't make out what he was saying. Presently Lingle said, "Okay, thanks, kid," and came back on the line. "Check the Quarter hotels," he instructed. "Look for three guys representing the Jazz Hall of Fame. Find them, you'll find McCulla. Don't waste no time." He hung up.

At the phone, the ape opened the classified directory and ripped out the page listing the Vieux Carré hotels. They were all within a few blocks' radius, so it wouldn't take long to check them.

The woodwinds committee remained at Virgil's for an hour and a half, listening to two complete sets. They heard Lew McCulla play a full range of Dixieland numbers, from the basic clarinet exercise in "Eccentric" and the soft and soulful passages in "Never Touched Me" to a lively intertwining with Frog Norman's slide trombone in "Tin Roof Blues" and a masterful, unbelievably long concluding note in "Tiger Rag." It was a bravura performance that drew wild applause from the audience and rounds of compliments from the other musicians during the band's second and third breaks. McCulla surprised even himself. He hadn't played that sober in years, nor that well. God, if only Edie could have heard him tonight! Then again, he thought, glancing up at the black sky from the alley during their break, maybe she had.

As a courtesy to the woodwinds committee, Mr. Gaston picked them up in his chauffeured limousine when they were ready to leave Virgil's. The limousine was a 1937 Packard V-12 with bulletproof

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windows, as brand-new in appearance as it had been when it belonged to Ralph "Bottles" Capone, Big Al's brother, back in Chicago, before Gaston had acquired it from a subsequent owner.

"This is very kind of you, Mr. Gaston," the committee chairman said as they rode back to the Royal Orleans. "It seems an appropriate moment for us to express our gratitude for your continued financial support of the Jazz Hall of Fame. Needless to say, without generosity such as yours, the Hall wouldn't exist."

"My pleasure, gentlemen," Gaston said. "I suppose it would be unethical for me to ask how your voting will go this year?"

"I'm afraid it would, yes," the chairman replied. He exchanged smiles with the other two members of the committee. "We can certainly discuss music in general, however, as friends. My associates and I were just agreeing as we left the club that none of us had ever heard a better clarinet performance than we heard tonight. Never. And," he emphasized, "we've already listened to the other two nominees."

Gaston sat back and added his own pleased smile to theirs.

An hour later, after Tradition Hall closed for the night, Peanuts Kenner, the regular clarinetist at Virgil's, found the band in the alley on a break after their fourth set. He went over to McCulla, who was finally allowing himself to take a drink.

"How'd it go tonight, my man?" Peanuts asked.

"Real good," McCulla replied. Everything okay over at Tradition?"

"Pure notes all the way. You heading out now?"

"Yeah, soon's I collect my kid. Heading for—"

"Don't tell me, bro," Peanuts interrupted. He put out his hand. "Just play it mellow, wherever."

McCulla shook hands with him. "Thanks, man."

When the band went back in for the fifth set, Peanuts took his regular chair while McCulla cased his clarinet, thanked and said goodbye to Virgil, and left by the kitchen door. Walking down the narrow alley, McCulla couldn't help smiling, thinking how well he had played. He had hit notes tonight, and *held* them, and reached a clarity and quality and achieved a vibrato like he had heard Sidney Bechet do when Bechet played with Noble Sissle and McCulla had been about the age his own kid was now. What a feeling it had been! God, he thought, looking up at the sky again, Edie just *had* to have been listening.

It was as McCulla was looking up at the sky that the first ape hit

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him, real low and real hard, and McCulla doubled up and slipped to his knees, dropping his clarinet case. One ape pulled him to his feet from behind and held his arms while the other methodically worked him over with both hands like he was a heavy bag in a gym. Most of the blows were to the diamond formed by McCulla's waist and two hipbones. There were occasional diversions to his lips and nose and cheeks, to draw some external blood, but the ape doing the punching was too professional to damage his knuckles and stayed mainly in the soft areas, counting on the ruptures and internal bleeding he knew he was causing. He worked on McCulla for five minutes, until he figured the musician had taken eight thousand dollars' worth, then he and his partner left the unconscious man face-down, arms stretched over his head, in the dark shadows of the alley.

It was half an hour later that a man on his way to work a night shift backed his car out of the garage and without even knowing it, ran one rear tire over both of McCulla's hands.

Old Rainey found McCulla's kid just before midnight at the corner of Bienville and Royal.

"You tol' me you gon' be working on Iberville," he accused.

"Changed my mind," the kid said. "What do you want now?"

Rainey pursed his lips and chewed silently on some words before finally saying, "Mr. Gaston, he tol' me to see you got home tonight."

The kid's eyes instantly flashed suspicion. "What's happened?" he asked.

"Yo' daddy got beat up. He in the Orleans Parish Hospital." The kid started to hurry away but Rainey grabbed his arm. "Hold on, now! You cain't get in to see him. He in what dey calls 'tensive care. Dey ain't let nobody in 'cept Mr. Gaston."

The kid sat down on an outside windowsill and stared at the sidewalk. Rainey sat beside him, chewing on words again.

"Mr. Gaston, he say for you to go on home and go to bed. He say I brang you to see him in de morning and he take you to the hospital wif him."

The kid kept staring at the sidewalk, saying nothing. He looked much older than his twelve years.

Finally Rainey asked, "You gon' do what Mr. Gaston say?"

"Yeah, okay," the kid said, rising and slinging his shine box. "Come on."

Rainey walked with him back to the apartment on Decatur. Nei-

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ther of them noticed the broken lock. Rainey waited while the kid washed and got ready for bed. "You gon' be all right by yo'self?"

"Sure. I been alone before."

Rainey nodded. "I come by and get you in de morning."

The old black man left. As soon as he did, the kid got back up and dressed.

When he got to the hospital, the kid looked on the floor directory and saw that Intensive Care was on two. He sneaked up the fire-stairs. It was now past 1:00 A.M. and the corridors were empty and quiet. All the nurses were at a lighted island in the middle of the long hall. The kid checked seven rooms before finally finding his father.

McCulla was lying on his back with tubes in both arms and both nostrils, and some kind of a hose in a hole in his side. The latter was attached to a nearby machine which made a soft purring noise. He had huge balloonlike bandages at the end of each arm.

After the kid had been standing by the bed for a minute, McCulla opened his eyes and smiled faintly. "Hiya, kid. I been waiting for you. I knew you'd get in. What kept you?"

The kid swallowed dryly. "I was working."

"Have a good night?"

"Okay. 'Bout four bucks." He looked over at the machine. "What's that for?"

"My kidneys are messed up," McCulla said. He paused a beat, then added, "Messed up bad." He saw that the kid was fighting tears and wished there was an easier way to do what he had to do. But there wasn't. "That ain't the worst of it, either," he said. He bobbed his chin at the two bandages. "They had to take off my hands."

The kid lowered his chin and closed his eyes. He refused to let himself cry. Constricting his throat and neck, he stood rigid as a statue.

"Gaston was in earlier," McCulla said. "Guess what he told me? I'm gonna be in the Jazz Hall of Fame. How do you like that, kid, your old man in the Jazz Hall of Fame?"

"Far out," the kid managed to say.

They fell silent, man and boy, for several long minutes, each with his own grief, his own agony. Then McCulla said, "I been thinking. A clarinet player without hands can't count on much work, know what I mean? So before you leave, I want you to unplug that machine over there. Will you do that for me?"

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The kid shook his head. "No." He looked up and saw tears trickling down his father's cheeks.

"Please, kid," McCulla begged. "It ain't just because of the hands, the music I'll never play again. It's because I've been so lonely for so long. I want to be with your mother again. Help me, kid. Please."

The kid went over and unplugged the machine. When he got back to the bed, McCulla nodded toward his clarinet case, on a chair by the door.

"That's yours if you want it."

"I don't," the kid said.

His father nodded. "Sure, I understand. I don't blame you. Listen, you better beat it now. I'm getting kind of drowsy."

The kid nodded and walked toward the door.

"So long, kid. Take care of yourself."

"Sure."

He left without taking the clarinet case.

A few minutes later, after McCulla had died, his kid sneaked back in and got the case.

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a *NEW* short story by

IAN STUART

Ian Stuart was born in a town north of London in 1927 and has worked in a bank for forty-one years, the last eighteen as a manager. He has written thirteen crime novels and spends a good deal of time gardening and playing golf. He and his wife have a boat on a canal near where they live in St. Albans. This time around he has written us a chase story set in Edinburgh during the annual Festival. It brings to mind some other classic chase scenarios—Odd Man Out, The Informer, The Asphalt Jungle, The Killing, This Gun for Hire. *It will grip you hard . . .*

DICKER McLEISH'S GIRL

by IAN STUART

The boy was dimly aware of the sounds of traffic and a band playing. They seemed to come from a great distance, the skirl of pipes playing an obligato to the rumble of cars and buses. Behind the castle on its rock, the sky was streaked with turquoise and gold, but here in the shadow of the trees near the top of the hill it was already nearly dark. A minute, sixty short seconds ago, he had been free of all cares, arrogant with his defiance—now suddenly he was afraid.

"Carole," he said, his thin wheedling voice edged with fear. He repeated her name more urgently. "Carole!"

The girl didn't answer. He leaned over her, not understanding, knowing only that she was dead, yet hardly believing it.

"Oh, Christ!" he breathed. And again, "Oh, Christ!" The words tumbled out almost without his knowing, and perhaps they were more a prayer than a blasphemy.

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The fear was growing inside him, spreading outward from its hard center until it threatened to suffocate him. He could think of only one thing, that he had to get away—from that place, from Edinburgh—to put as far as possible between himself and Dicker. He didn't know exactly what he had done, but the enormity of his crime and its inevitable consequences appalled him. Lowering the girl's head to the ground, he scrambled to his feet, his only thought to get away as quickly as he could.

He started running down the steep, winding path. A young couple were going down it ahead of him and he pushed past, hardly seeing them as he jostled the girl, not hearing the boy's curse that followed him down. Hard asphalt jarred his feet through his plimsolls but he was oblivious of the discomfort. Only his fear had any reality.

At the bottom of the path where it met the road, just past a phonebox, he stopped. To his left the road climbed round the side of the hill, heading eastward towards the coast and, eventually, England. To his right it ran down to Princes Street, where beyond the tower of the hotel the Scott Memorial stood up black and shapely against the darkening sky. There was the city, the Old Town and the New. And that way lay danger.

The boy understood that. But it was the only world he knew, and like a frightened rabbit diving into its burrow he started running again.

He didn't notice the dark-red car cruising up the road. There were two men in the car, Detective-sergeant Donald Smith and Detective-constable Kenneth McFadyen.

"That's Andy McBain," McFadyen, who was driving, said. "He looks as if he'd seen a ghost."

Smith had already seen the boy. Crafty wee bastard, he thought. Seventeen and already set on a life of minor crime. McBain was a minor irritant, a hanger-on in Edinburgh's underworld—a world which at this time every year was swollen by half the pickpockets in England and a good many from the rest of Western Europe. Con men, too, looking for easy pickings among the tourists who gathered there from all over the world in search of culture and entertainment.

Smith had nicked McBain a few weeks ago. Had him to rights. Then, when it came to court, McBain had produced witnesses he hadn't mentioned before who swore he was with them when the shop was broken into. The sheriff had had some hard words for the police for not doing their work properly. Which meant Smith. And instead

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of keeping quiet and accepting he was lucky, the boy had laughed in Smith's face in front of his cronies and two young constables. Donny Smith wasn't the man to take treatment like that philosophically, and the sight of McBain's face now, haggard with fear, cheered him.

"I wonder what's scared him," he said softly.

"Shall we pick him up?" It had been a boring evening so far and McFadyen sounded hopeful.

"No, pull up. Let's see what it was."

Forty-three years old, Smith looked shorter than his five feet ten because of the breadth of his shoulders and the shortness of his neck. He had the beginnings of a paunch, the result of many years' heavy drinking, but he was tough, mentally and physically, and took pride in his toughness. A hard man, they called him. He knew it and gloried in it. He took an inverted pride, too, in the knowledge that he woud never rise above his present rank, as if he believed that eventually a man ceased to be quite a man if he became an Inspector.

Together he and McFadyen strode up the path, passing the couple almost at the bottom. Farther up, they found the girl's body almost at once, lying only a few feet from the path. "Oh, God!" McFadyen breathed. "It's Dicker McLeish's girl."

Not Carole McLeish—*Dicker McLeish's girl.* Because at sixteen her only claim to recognition was her relationship to her father, his only child and the pride of his soul—in the unlikely event of Dicker having a soul. Half the city knew him or had heard of him, the small-time gang boss, organizer of protection rackets, vice, and half the crime in Edinburgh. Or so they said. Greengrocer, bully boy, extortioner, fence: Dicker McLeish. The hard yin.

"You get back to the car and report in," Smith said. He wanted time to think. "I'll stay here."

"What aboot the boy?" McFadyen asked.

"We can pick him up any time."

The constable stole another look at the crumpled form by the path and walked away down the hill. The prospect of what Dicker would do when he heard the news horrified him.

He called in, reported what they had found, and returned to where Smith was waiting.

"I'm going somewhere," the older man told him.

"But what aboot—?" McFadyen saw the sergeant's expression and stopped. He knew better than to argue with Smith in his present mood. All the same, he was puzzled.

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Smith knew he had to hurry. He reckoned he had about five minutes before the cars would arrive with the bright boys from Headquarters and if he wasn't back then they would want to know why not. In the meantime, what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

Over the North Bridge, Andy McBain slowed to an intermittent trot. He was panting and his legs ached. People muttered angrily as he squirmed past, but he hardly noticed.

Save for an old derelict propped up against a shop front, the arcade was deserted. At the end, McBain turned right into High Street. The band was no longer playing but occasional sounds drifted down to him from the tattoo on the Castle Esplanade, funneled between the tall old buildings. He was walking all the time now, his ebbing strength sapped by the slope, making for his room just off the Grassmarket. They would come there looking for him, he knew that as surely as he knew his own name, but it wouldn't be for a while yet.

He needed money. Without it he couldn't get away, and he was down to his last three pounds. But he had plenty of friends who would be glad to help him—his only problem was time.

He started running again, almost colliding with a man coming out of a pub half drunk.

"Wha's the hurry, Jimmy?" he called after the boy. "Are the polis after you?"

There was a stitch in McBain's side and his tortured body called out for a respite, but he dared not stop. Up to the Lawnmarket and down a steep alley dropping off the side of the Castle Rock he went, stumbling with fatigue. There were few people here among the narrow ways and crumbling tenements of the Old Town, where walls and roofs made angled patterns against the sky. Turning into a narrow close, he stopped at a door, glanced anxiously over his shoulder, and, satisfied nobody had followed him, pushed it open.

A woman's voice behind a door at the end of the passage called, "Who's that?"

"It's me, Mrs. Campbell!" the boy shouted back.

The old hag would be getting herself ready to go out for the evening, he thought. She might be a drab figure by day, but by night she blossomed out in the tawdry finery of a woman half her age. No use asking her for money—he owed a week's rent as it was and she was as mean as an Aberdonian on a flag day. On weary legs, he dragged himself up the stairs to his room on the third floor and threw himself down on the bed.

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He had lived here for the last eight months, but for all the impression he had made on the dingy room it might have been a couple of weeks. True, there were a few photographs of nude girls cut out of magazines stuck on the walls with Sellotape, but they were nearly as impersonal as the decrepit furniture.

After a few minutes the pain eased, and pulling a shabby holdall down from the top of the wardrobe he began cramming his few possessions into it. It didn't take long, and when he had done he left the room, creeping down the stairs and out by the front door into the shadowy close.

Detective-inspector Logan watched Smith emerge from the darkness down the path. "Where have you been?" he demanded.

"I needed a quick leak," Smith replied. "That beer goes right through you."

Logan let it pass. He was thirty-eight, a lean, quietly spoken Highlander. He didn't like Smith. He hated his bully-boy ways, his pride in his own macho image, and his intolerance. Yet he knew that within his limitations the other man was a good policeman. He knew, too, that the dislike was mutual, that Smith despised him for being soft, and that part of it was founded on envy, each seeing in the other a quality he would like to have possessed in some degree. With Logan it was the sergeant's assurance, even if it stemmed from a lack of perception (which was one reason he would never be promoted). Did Donny Smith ever wonder if he might be wrong? Logan doubted it.

"Has anything been touched?" he asked.

"I made sure she was dead," the sergeant replied in a voice as unyielding as a brick wall.

"Nothing else?"

"No, sir," McFadyen said.

The photographer finished his work and the scene-of-crime officer began his meticulous examination of the body and the surrounding area of muddied grass and asphalt.

"You say you saw a boy running away?" Logan inquired of McFadyen, resuming the questioning Smith's return had interrupted.

"Yes, sir—young Andy McBain. He looked scared."

"You know McBain, don't you, Sergeant?" Logan knew all about Smith's recent tribulations.

"I know him, aye."

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"What do you know about him?"

"He's an errand boy for Dicker McLeish," Smith answered grudgingly. "He started taking the girl oot and Dicker warned him to stay away from her."

"Carole was like the Holy Grail to Dicker," McFadyen volunteered.

Logan gave him a surprised look. "That pure?"

"In *his* eyes, sir. —Maybe she *was,* too."

"We'd better find the lad before he does, then," Logan said.

"Aye," Smith agreed in a flat voice.

If you don't sound a bit less grudging, I'll have you back in uniform, Logan thought. But not just now. Not until I've squeezed all you know about this lot out of you. "Where does McBain live?" he asked.

"He has a room wi' a Mrs. Campbell near the Grassmarket," Smith said.

"You know him. You think he'll go there?"

"He may do. But no' for long. He'll know Dicker wull be after him."

Logan nodded. "I want a list of all his associates; anywhere he might go to ground. And a general call out for him. See to that, Sergeant."

"Right."

And show a bit more bloody enthusiasm. If only because there's a young constable listening and you're supposed to set him a good example, not use him as a shield because you know I won't bawl you out in front of him. "*Now,* Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

As McFadyen had done a short time before, Logan watched Smith's back disappear down the path and forced back the anger which had risen in his throat like bile. Two men exchanged greetings in the darkness and seconds later a short elderly man in a raincoat and carrying a black bag appeared out of the shadows.

"Evening, Doctor," Logan said.

"Evening, Inspector."

The formality concealed a mutual liking and respect and Logan felt his irritation begin to evaporate as he settled into the familiar routine of an investigation.

"Murder?" Doctor Lawrie inquired, watching the scene of crime officers at work.

"Suspicious death until you tell us."

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"Uh." The police surgeon looked away over the falling ground to the west. "Evenings are beginning to draw in. Soon be autumn."

"And then winter. Aye," Logan agreed.

"I havenae got twenty pounds just noo." Tommy Strachan looked uneasily at the queue beginning to form in front of his hotdog stand. Time wasted was custom lost, and this was by far his best time of the year—he had no intention of throwing away good money listening to Andy McBain. Anyway, he didn't like the look of it: Andy was one of Dicker McLeish's mob and he was scared. To Strachan that spelled trouble. If Andy couldn't turn to Dicker for help, it must mean the big man was the reason for his fear. And if he was, Tommy didn't want to know.

"I'll pay it back," McBain whined.

"Aye, mebbe. Look, get awa' just noo, eh? I'm awful busy."

"Just ten, then," Andy pleaded.

"Noo!"

You lousy, bastard, McBain thought. But he knew when he was beaten, and he walked away down an alley which led by others equally narrow toward the Canongate. Eddie Willis would be good for a tenner. Maybe twenty. He and Eddie were pals.

Coming out into High Street just below St. Giles', he looked furtively in both directions. What he saw stopped him in his tracks. Thirty yards away on the other side of the street was a burly man with dark ginger hair growing low across his forehead. A man who looked as if violence was the only language he understood, and who liked it that way. McBain knew him well.

For several seconds they stared at each other. Jamie McParland was one of McLeish's strong-arm men, among the first Dicker turned to when there was a reluctant publican or bookie to be persuaded. To McBain it seemed there could be only one reason for his being where he was now and he felt sick with fear.

Then, without a sign of recognition, McParland spat into the gutter and walked away in the direction of the Lawnmarket.

It was the big man's failure to acknowledge him Andy found most frightening, and without looking back the boy took to his heels.

After a couple of hundred yards he turned left, then left again into another alley, stopping at a door set in the blank wall of a tenement. Its paint had passed peeling and only faint stains were left on the bare wood, across which somebody had daubed EDDIE'S INN in crude red letters. Opening the door, he stepped inside.

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The inn was a cheap café and most of the customers were under twenty. Some sported shabby leather jackets, others were in sweatshirts. A high proportion of the men had hair glued into spikes and dyed orange, pink, or magenta. There was a stench of cigarette smoke, cheap perfume, sweat, and greasy food. A jukebox blared out a rock number.

A young man with lank dark hair and a heavy moustache ill suited to his weedy body was propping up the counter. When McBain walked in, his expression, which had been bored, changed to alarm. He made an instinctive move toward the cupboard he called his kitchen, but there was no escape that way.

The place was one of Andy's regular haunts. Half the customers here now knew him and he felt a faint, spurious confidence returning.

"Hi, Eddie," he said.

" 'Lo, Andy." Eddie Willis's apprehension was all too clear.

"I need twenty quid, Eddie. Urgent."

"Why come to me?"

"C'mon, Eddie. I'll pay you back."

"I cannae help, Andy." Willis shot a frightened look at the nearest customers as if he was afraid they might hear him. "I dinnae ken what you've done, but Dicker's put the word aboot. He's oot for you."

"I havenae done anything." The whining note had returned to the boy's voice. "I've got to get awa', Eddie. I'm skint—I must have twenty poonds."

"I cannae. I'm sorry, Andy."

McBain stared at him. Then, crushed by the rejection and his fear, he turned and slunk out.

"The doctor thinks she died of natural causes," Logan said. He noticed the flicker of expression which passed briefly across Smith's rocklike features and wondered what it meant. Was it surprise? Relief they weren't faced with a murder, or that Dicker wouldn't be spilling blood in his quest for vengeance? Perhaps it meant nothing. "He can't find any signs of violence—it looks as if her heart just stopped beating. We'll have to wait for the postmortem to know for sure, but it may have been some slight shock, he says. Some sort of inhibition."

"So why was McBain running away?" Smith demanded. "He'll be telling us next she wished herself dead."

Logan eyed him coolly. He knew now he'd been wrong. Smith

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wasn't glad Carole McLeish had died naturally—he'd wanted her death to be murder. "What would you do if you found Dicker's daughter dead in your arms after he'd warned you to have nothing to do with her? Would you go and tell him you were sorry but you didn't mean to kill her? Would you, Sergeant? McBain must have thought he was responsible—and he's only a lad."

Dicker no longer had any reason for hunting the boy, Logan told himself. However unwilling he might be to accept the fact, Carole had died because of some failure of her own body. It was tragic, but not McBain's fault.

And it wouldn't stop her father. It was nearly an hour since Logan had gone to tell him his daughter was dead. The Inspector hated men like McLeish. With their greed and viciousness, they almost justified the Donny Smiths, but he had felt sympathy for the big man then. Yet while the grief was genuine, the shock wasn't new. Logan had gone himself because he feared the consequences. When they were hurt, the McLeishes of this world struck out blindly. Revenge was instinctive with them.

"Has anybody come up with a sighting of the boy yet?" he asked.

The other men shook their heads.

"Is Dicker still at home?"

"Yes, sir," a uniformed sergeant said.

Logan wished he could share the sergeant's confidence. It was just a feeling and perhaps he was being too pessimistic, but it was against nature for McLeish to sit at home doing nothing.

"I want McBain found—fast," he said. He was plagued by a nagging uneasiness. He didn't believe in hunches or intuition, but there was a sense you acquired after long years in the job and it was disturbing him now.

"McFadyen, go and see McLeish," he said. "Don't harass him, just tell him nobody killed his daughter—she died of natural causes. And make sure he stays where he is."

The big man had plenty of reserves he could call on to hunt down Andy McBain. Logan was pinning his hopes to a belief that this was something he would want to handle himself.

The other three men in the room watched Boxer Chisholm put down the phone.

"Where's he noo?" Dicker demanded.

"Eddie Willis says he's been to his place begging for money," Boxer reported. "Eddie sent him awa'."

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Dicker grunted. Getting out of his apartment had been almost too easy. The copper who had been left to keep watch on the front didn't know he owned the adjoining flat, too, or that there was a connecting door between them. All he'd had to do was slip through it and go down the stairs and out by the back door. Now he was in no hurry. As long as the murdering wee bastard didn't leave Edinburgh, Dicker was happy for him to sweat a bit longer.

The phone rang again and the others waited while Chisholm went to answer it. This time the call was even briefer. "That was Jamie," he said. "Andy's heading for the Princes Street gardens."

"He's going to Queenie's." An unpleasant smile spread slowly across McLeish's face. "Let's be going then, eh?"

Up on the Esplanade a band was playing a quick march. McBain heard it as he descended the long flight of steps. Behind him the buildings rose sheer, a stone wall climbing high above the city, dark and menacing. Ahead was the wide expanse of turf, and beyond it the lights of Princes Street. To his left, past the precipice of the castle rock, he could see the traffic moving up Lothian Road.

The march did nothing to lift his spirits. His fear obsessed him, so that he hardly noticed his aching legs or the thumping of his heart. Hope had deserted him and he was almost resigned to what seemed the inevitable. Dully, he wondered who Dicker would send. He had seen more than one of the big man's victims after his boys had dealt with them, bloodied and mutilated.

Maybe Dicker would come himself. Oh, God!

"He's no' there," McFadyen reported on the car radio, panting a little because he had run back to the car.

"Did you find out where he'd gone?" Logan demanded.

"No, sir. His wife's there, but all she'll say is that he went oot a while ago. I don't think she knows."

"You'd better come back then." Logan replaced the phone. It was what he had feared.

Two minutes ago, a report had come in that McBain had been seen heading toward the Mound. Why hadn't a policeman there spotted him and brought him in? Heaven knew there were enough of them. But the whole force was overstretched, dealing with the hordes of visitors and the problems they brought with them. There was still some time to go before the pubs closed, yet already this evening they had arrested two pickpockets and a confidence trick-

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ster, a young Swede had been stabbed in a brawl, and there had been the usual quota of burglaries and drunks. Edinburgh wasn't a particularly unruly place, but nowhere that size was wholly law-abiding.

Logan walked over to the window and looked out. Here on the north side of the city the Festival made hardly any impression on the quiet roads, but somewhere over there, a mile or two away, among the crowds Andy McBain, scared out of his wits, was running. Almost certainly McLeish was there, too, set on vengeance. It was like looking for a couple of needles in a haystack. Worse, because the hay in this stack didn't stay still for a moment—it was continually shifting and reforming—nor did the needles. Yet in a way, Logan reflected, perhaps that was an advantage. A moving figure in the streets was easier to find than one that remained indoors, and three cars were touring those streets now, their only object to find McBain. Logan went back to his desk and put out a call for McLeish to be brought in, too.

"All right," he said, "let's go." There was nothing more to be gained by sitting here waiting for other people to report success or failure and he wanted to be out there, involved in what was going on.

Smith and McFadyen followed him out to the yard where his car was waiting, and the three piled into it. As they turned out into the road, the radio crackled. McFadyen listened.

"The boy's been seen at the end of Bank Street," he reported. "It looks as if he's heading for Waverley Station."

Logan wondered if McBain hoped to lose himself in the crowds there, or perhaps at that end of Princes Street. They said there was safety in numbers and the best place to hide was in a crowd, but that was true only when the numbers weren't all on the other side. Dicker McLeish could call on a dozen, maybe twenty toughs and back-street informants, while Andy McBain was on his own. There was little enough safety in odds like those.

On the other hand, there were plenty of places to hide around a big station and it would take a major operation to flush him out if he went to ground there. Logan thought it unlikely he intended to take a train. A boy like McBain would be more likely to hitch a lift on a lorry, preferably one going a long way, and if he had meant to catch a train he wouldn't have wasted all this time running in a circle while Dicker came nearer and nearer.

"Where do you think he's making for?" Logan asked Smith, who

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was sitting beside him in the back of the car looking out of the window, apparently unconcerned, barely even interested. His seeming lack of involvement irritated Logan again.

"He could be going to Queenie Henderson's," the sergeant suggested. Mrs. Henderson ran a cheap lodging house and café frequented by the likes of Andy McBain and his friends.

"It's a long way if he is, and he's been on the run the best part of two hours already," Logan commented.

"Aye," Smith agreed, his tone hard. The car swung round the end of Princes Street into Charlotte Square, momentarily leaving the bright lights and the crowds behind. Then they were round the other side and back in Princes Street heading east, siren wailing now as they weaved in and out of the lines of slow-moving traffic.

Dicker saw McBain near the end of Market Street. The big man hadn't run more than a dozen yards at a stretch for years, but he ran now, hardly noticing his thudding heart or the stitch in his side. His henchmen lumbered in his wake.

McBain heard their heavy steps behind him and looked back over his shoulder. There were four of them. Driving his exhausted legs on, he ran for the south end of the bridge carrying the road over the main line just outside the station. A police car's siren wailed somewhere ahead of him, but the sound was too familiar and his fear too obsessive for him to pay any attention to it. It never occurred to him it might represent sanctuary. The police were as much his enemies as McLeish and his toughs.

Three men were running toward him from the other end of the bridge. It was too shadowy and his eyes were too bleary with tiredness and sweat for him to recognize them, but he knew they must be three more of Dicker's mob. Glancing back, he saw McLeish only a hundred yards behind him and—sobbing, desperate—he swerved to his left. Straight for the parapet of the bridge.

There was no one near enough to pull him back. He scrambled up onto the low wall and stood there, silhouetted against the lights of Princes Street behind him.

"McBain, stop! It's the police!" Logan shouted.

He was too late. Or perhaps the boy didn't hear him. In any case, he believed he had as much to fear from the law as from his old associates. For a second longer he balanced there, while it seemed to Logan time stood still, then he fell.

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They heard the train coming out of the station and the boy's thin scream.

Logan had sent McFadyen out of the room. Now he and Smith were alone. He knew that if he gave vent to the bitter anger he felt he would lose control of the situation and produce no reaction but disdain, and he intended every word he spoke to pierce the older man's thick, complacent skin. So he waited. If either of them was to lose his cool, it must be Smith. "I'll give you the benefit of the doubt," he said, speaking slowly so that the words had an edge, "and I'll assume you didn't mean young McBain to be killed."

"You'll—?" Smith said contemptuously.

"Wait until I've finished, Sergeant." Logan's voice rose. "I said I'll assume you didn't expect McLeish to kill McBain when you told him you'd found his daughter dead and seen the boy running away. You thought he'd arrange to have him roughed up, didn't you? And that would have suited you fine, because you hated the boy for making you look a fool. You saw a way of getting back at him and doing McLeish for grievous bodily harm at the same time. You told Dicker because you knew what his daughter meant to him and that he'd go looking for revenge."

"What makes you think I told him?" Smith spoke coolly, almost insolently, but a pulse was throbbing in his forehead.

"I don't think, Sergeant, I know. You found her within a minute of the boy leaving her. Nobody went up the path ahead of you and nobody came down. After that there was somebody on guard there the whole time and nobody could have got near enough to her to see who she was."

For a moment Smith said nothing. Then he demanded, "When do you make oot I told him, then?"

"When you said you'd gone for a pee. There's a phonebox near the bottom of that path."

Their eyes met. "Is this official—sir?" Smith demanded.

Logan stared at him. He wanted the contempt he felt to show and Smith to see it. "No," he said, as coldly as before. "It isn't official, Sergeant. But I know it's what happened, and so do you. If I could prove it, you'd have been charged by now. As it is, I won't have you working with me again—ever. Now you can go."

For a second or two it seemed that Smith was going to say something, but then he turned and went out of the room without speaking.

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Eggers squinted at Hastings as if to fix him in his mind. "A neighbor who works nights dropped in to check on Edna Croft and make sure she was awake to take some prescription medicine, found her comatose, and called us. The temperature in the apartment was a hundred and three . . ."

HEAT

by JOHN LUTZ

The city had been an oven for seventeen days and nights. During that time the temperature hadn't dropped below ninety, and the old brick buildings that housed most of the poor had heated up and stayed hot. Many of the elderly had been evacuated to cooling centers set up by the city. Others had refused to leave their homes because their pets needed care or because they feared that when they returned they'd find their few possessions stolen. Portable fans were donated to some of the disadvantaged in the poorer sections of town, but they only created blast furnaces if all the windows were closed—and cooped up in their tiny apartments, afraid of who might enter if they left a window open at night, many of the ill and infirm virtually baked to death. Ambulances were overworked, and obtained only after long waits. Deal and Hastings had used the patrol car to rush an old woman to the hospital two nights ago and found her dead from heat stroke when they arrived.

Thirty-two deaths had been attributed to the heat in the past two weeks. Unless the weather pattern broke, there would be more.

Patrolman Buddy Deal was walking into the precinct garage after evening muster when he stopped suddenly and gaped. His cigar almost dropped from his mouth, tilting forward at a precarious angle and spilling grey ash onto his uniform shirt to join the taco-sauce stain that hadn't come out in the wash. There was his partner, Dave Hastings—at least he thought it was Hastings—with his rump extending from the back seat of the parked patrol car, moving a hand back now and then to drop wadded cigar- and gum-wrappers and

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various debris into a metal waste can. A steady humming sound was wafting from the back of the car.

"We haven't even left the precinct house yet," Deal said, flicking more cigar ash dangerously close to one of Hastings' gleaming black shoes. "Isn't it a little early to be cleaning out the car?"

Hastings backed out of the car, straightened, and smoothed back his razor-styled hair. "I'm getting rid of the mess you made last night," he said. "Those slobs on the day shift refuse to clean up after you—they just toss everything to the back of the car."

Deal grunted. Whatever the day shift did was okay with him. "What's that in your hand?" he asked.

Hastings glanced down. "It's a portable vacuum cleaner. I'm keeping it in the car as long as we ride together."

Deal grunted again, spilled more ash. "You and your gadgets," he mumbled and climbed in behind the steering wheel. He saw with dismay that Hastings had emptied the ashtray. Deal had left a wrapped-up, half chewed piece of gum buried under the ashes where the day shift wouldn't find it. And *The Sporting News* was gone from above the sun visor. Trust Hastings to remove the little amenities that made a car a home. Deal might be more than a little on the irresponsible and sloppy side, but Hastings could drive a saint to sin with his rigid conformity and compulsive neatness. The other cops were calling Hastings E.T., for Extra Tidy.

If all that weren't bad enough, Hastings would replace things he removed from the car with useless gadgets like extra ammunition clips, a see-through tinted visor to enhance night vision, even a portable steam iron to remove wrinkles from his uniform in case he was unexpectedly summoned to Headquarters. Now, as he got into the car to sit beside Deal, he snapped the little vacuum cleaner that looked like a mechanical anteater into a bracket he'd mounted beneath the dashboard. Next he removed a leather pouch from the glove compartment and placed it beside him on the seat.

"What's that thing?" Deal asked.

"Camera," Hastings explained. He removed a 35-millimeter camera from the pouch to show Deal. "It's equipped with a wide-angle lens. I read in *Police Digest* about this officer out west who used a camera and wide-angle lens to keep a photographic record of his beat."

"Photographic record why?" Deal asked, irritated.

"At night, after work, he'd study the photos of the streets. That way he could note day-to-day differences—unfamiliar cars in the

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area, apartments with shades that were never raised, anything suspicious. When he studied the photos with a magnifying glass one night, he spotted a wanted drug dealer in the neighborhood and effected his arrest. And this camera has an attachment that records the time of each photograph, so changes in the neighborhood can even be noted on an hour-to-hour basis."

"Aren't you forgetting we're working nights?" Deal asked.

Hastings smiled his handsome, infuriatingly smug smile. He tapped the side of the camera with his forefinger. "Extra fast, light-sensitive film," he explained. "And a lens that will photograph in dim light. Also, I've made arrangements with a film processor—"

"Spare me the technicalities," Deal interrupted. He started the engine, loosened his belt, switched on the inadequate air-conditioner, and settled back in the seat. It was going to be a long, hot shift.

"Let's get a fix on what Arnie Brubaker is up to tonight," Hastings suggested, referring to a professional burglar he and Deal had been assigned to keep under loose observation.

"Let's get something cold to drink," Deal said, and drove from the precinct garage with a squeal of hot tires and called the car into service.

Snick, whir. Snick, whir. The camera's shutter was tripped and the film advanced automatically over and over again. Hastings was nearer than he suspected to being shot with Deal's service revolver.

"Will you quit takin' pictures!" Deal said, Orange Delight spilling onto his pants to join the cavalcade of stains.

"One more shot," Hastings pleaded, with his recruitment-poster grin. "This is a high-crime neighborhood. I've used up almost an entire roll of film here. I figure two rolls a shift will—"

"Time to check on our pal Brubaker," Deal said, braking as he yanked the wheel to the left. The car dipped into a violent U-turn and headed south on North Twelfth Street. Hastings began to hum what sounded like a military march as he fidgeted with his camera.

Deal parked across the street from Brubaker's apartment. Most of the building was dark, but there was a light showing in Brubaker's window. "Think he's home?" Hastings asked.

"It's too hot to worry about it," Deal answered. "Let's sit here a while and see if we can spot him coming or going, or crossing our line of sight in the window. We might as well be here as cruising around—it's so hot most of the criminals are taking a break."

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"They're waiting for the streets to cool," Hastings said. "We're not the only ones who've been working nights the past few weeks."

Deal didn't laugh. Hastings wasn't joking. Nighttime wasn't cool, but the temperature usually did fall to below a hundred degrees. A lot of daytime activities had been relegated to the night. He kept the engine running. The air-conditioner was on high but the car was still stifling. He could feel the heat radiating from the rolled-up windows. He shifted his 240 pounds and fired up one of his abominable cheap cigars that made Hastings sick.

"Edward Eight," the dispatcher's metallic voice crackled from the radio. "Code Seventeen at six fifty-four Allister."

"Us," Deal said, and barked acknowledgment into the microphone before the call to investigate a domestic disturbance could be repeated.

"Just a minute," Hastings said, gripping Deal's shoulder. "Look." He pointed to Brubaker's window.

A man's shadow passed the window, then passed again in the opposite direction, as if pacing.

"Okay," Deal said, "so we know he's home." He put the car in gear.

"Keep the car still for a few more seconds," Hastings said. He raised his camera, held it steady, and waited for the shadowy figure to cross behind the window again. *Snick, whir.* "Got him!"

Deal stamped down on the accelerator, then switched on the siren and the rooftop cherry light.

Beside him, Hastings loaded another roll of film into the camera and cranked down his window to let some of the cigar smoke out of the car.

The domestic disturbance turned out to be a squabble between neighbors over a dog that had leaped a fence and snatched a steak from a spilled bag of groceries. By the time Deal and Hastings arrived, the husbands, wives, and children were exhausted from screaming at each other in the heat. Under the baleful eyes of neighbors on lighted porches and behind windows, the matter was soon resolved without the necessity of arresting anyone. The dog lost interest in the steak and trotted away, glancing back placidly over its shoulder.

"Why don't you get a shot of that dog?" Deal asked Hastings.

By the end of the shift both men were tired. There was no way

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not to be affected by the simmering weather. When Deal handed over the patrol-car keys to the day shift, Sergeant Lowry, who was assigned to the car, grinned and pointed as Hastings was walking away. "What's that your partner's carrying?"

"Vacuum cleaner and a camera," Deal replied unsmilingly. He had been sapped of his sense of humor.

"Eggers wants to see you and Hastings," Lowry added, lowering himself into Edward Eight.

Deal caught up with Hastings and they went together to Captain Eggers' office.

In the anteroom Eggers used for interrogation sat Arnie Brubaker. Eggers and Sergeant Hall were with him.

Eggers was a truck of a man gone to fat, but not so much fat that muscle didn't still show on his wide frame. He had a florid pug face that gave the impression he might bite. The white-haired, elderly Sergeant Hall was standing against one wall, looking more apprehensive than Brubaker.

Eggers was bending over Brubaker, who was sitting comfortably in a wooden chair with his legs crossed. When the captain saw Deal and Hastings enter, he stood up straight and glared down at Brubaker with contempt. Brubaker smiled. He had a disarming smile. He was a dapper, amiable-looking man whose specialty was preying on senior citizens.

"We have a bad situation," Eggers told Deal and Hastings. "An eighty-year-old invalid named Edna Croft was found unconscious in her apartment on North Twelfth about three hours ago."

"I remember the squeal," Deal said. "It came down just after we went out of service to drive to a burglary-alarm call over on Freemont, Charles Eight took the North Twelfth call."

"We'd been driving up and down North Twelfth much of the night," Hastings said. "I used a lot of film there. It's a particularly crime-ridden environment, as you know, the result of population displacement and urban decay."

"Yeah," Eggers said, cocking his head to the side and squinting at Hastings as if to fix him in his mind. "A neighbor who works nights dropped in to check on Edna Croft and make sure she was awake to take some prescription medicine, found her comatose, and called us. The temperature in the apartment was a hundred and three."

Deal could picture the buildings on North Twelfth, old brick two-

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story structures with flat tar roofs. He winced as he thought of the old woman languishing in the sweatbox of an apartment.

Eggers continued. "Sometime during the night, the neighbor says, Edna Croft's portable TV was stolen from her apartment."

"Maybe the neighbor took it," Brubaker suggested.

"Shut up, Mr. Brubaker," Eggers said, meaning all but the "mister." Brubaker was about to say more, then thought better of it. "We all know Mr. Brubaker's M.O.," Eggers went on. "We're familiar with how he allegedly makes his living by burglarizing the homes of the very old. Good business that, because even if he's caught his lawyer manages to stall the case until the victim either expires or can be accused of senility. Either way, the victim can't effectively testify against Mr. Brubaker."

"If I'm not being charged," Brubaker said patiently, "I think I'll wander on home."

Eggers rested a broad hand on his shoulder, and Brubaker sat still and sighed. What was the law, an instrument for harassment? "I'd phone my lawyer," he said, "only I don't believe we'll reach that point. Because we all know I don't deserve this heat. But I'm getting tired of seeing a cop car outside my apartment every time I look out the window."

Eggers ignored him and drew Deal and Hastings into the main office. He closed the door on the interrogation room. "You guys were supposed to keep an eye on Brubaker. Was he home last night?"

"He was there at eleven thirty-two, sir," Hastings said. "We checked his place of residence several times through the night and there was always a light on, but the eleven thirty-two time is the only one we can confirm on the basis of physical sighting."

Eggers stared at Hastings.

"Verification by way of a photograph, sir," Hastings added.

"What?"

"He means he took Brubaker's picture when he walked past his window," Deal explained.

Eggers looked perplexed. "Why did you do that?"

"He's an incurable shutterbug," Deal cut in, before Hastings could launch into an endless explanation.

"That would help provide an alibi for Brubaker," Eggers said bleakly, and even Hastings knew enough to keep quiet.

"How long can we hold Brubaker?" Deal asked.

"About five more minutes," Eggers said. "Which is when I expect a report from Identification."

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Even before he'd finished speaking, the desk phone buzzed. Eggers picked up the receiver, punched the blinking line button, and as he listened his face glowed and became almost handsome.

"That was I.D.," he said, replacing the receiver. "Brubaker made a mistake. There was a fingerprint on the window frame of Edna Croft's apartment, and it belongs to him. That's enough to get a search warrant for his apartment." He charged into the interrogation room.

Brubaker was standing up, tucking in his shirt.

"Sit back down," Eggers commanded. He informed Brubaker that he was under arrest and began reading him his rights.

Brubaker sat tolerantly until Eggers was finished. He was a pro. He realized he must have dropped a print. "I was in that lady's apartment about a week ago," he said, "to ask if she needed any odd jobs done. She gave me a portable television to fix for her. It's in my apartment now."

"We'll see what she says about that," Eggers told him, "as soon as she regains consciousness."

Brubaker shrugged with exaggerated nonchalance and grinned. "I think I'll make that call to my lawyer."

Sergeant Hall escorted Brubaker to the front desk, where he would be booked and allowed his phone call.

As Deal and Hastings were about to leave Eggers' office, the phone buzzed again. This time Eggers' face changed for the worse as he listened. He aged a decade in the time the receiver went from his ear back to its cradle.

"Edna Croft died ten minutes ago," he said glumly. "Another heatstroke victim." He slammed a meaty fist into his palm. "Now there's no one to refute Brubaker's story, no one to testify against him. There's no way to get a conviction when the victim is dead. Legally, it's almost impossible to prove that a crime has even taken place."

"When are you going to release Brubaker?" Deal asked.

"Now," Eggers snapped. "I have to."

When Deal joined Hastings the next evening after muster, Hastings had already vacuumed the patrol car and was standing beside it waiting for him. Deal was tired. The business with Brubaker had disturbed him and he hadn't been able to sleep this morning. He'd spent most of the day downing popcorn and beer and watching a ball game on television. Hastings looked as if he'd spent the entire day getting a facial and having his uniform pressed.

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"Let's get going," he said as Deal approached. "We've been given the pleasure of arresting Arnie Brubaker."

Deal's eyebrows arched in disbelief. "Says who?"

"Captain Eggers. I talked to him this afternoon at his home."

"You went to Eggers' house when he was off duty and weren't thrown out?" Deal stared incredulously as Hastings nodded.

"We don't have much time," Hastings said, climbing in behind the steering wheel. "The news media have already received anonymous phone calls instructing them what time to be at the precinct house."

"Anonymous phone calls?" Deal said. "How would you know that?"

Hastings started the car and they drove from the garage. "I'll explain it all in good time," he said.

They interrupted Brubaker's late-night snack, which Brubaker angrily pointed out to them as they entered his apartment. Deal gazed at the half eaten burned pizza on the formica table and didn't see why Brubaker minded being interrupted.

"I thought this burglary charge was all settled," Brubaker said, glancing at a portable TV on the floor in a corner.

"I talked to a social worker who delivered a portable fan to Edna Croft last night," Hastings said. "Edna Croft was a complete invalid. The social worker put her to bed, then stayed to visit with her, watching the Tonight Show on the television set you said the deceased gave you last week to repair for her."

Brubaker's pale eyes reflected an uneasy moment, then hardened. "Finish what you came to say. The anchovies on my pizza are getting cold."

"At twelve-twenty A.M. I took a photograph that included Edna Croft's apartment building. She lived in a one-room efficiency. It has only one window. In the photograph, which I had enlarged, that window is open, and you can even see a corner of the portable fan sitting inside it—all exactly the way the social worker says she left things around twelve-thirty. Which means that you had to steal that TV and leave your fingerprint *after* that time, and before Edna Croft was found unconscious."

Brubaker sneered. "So you can place me in the apartment last night. Haven't you heard?" he said. "The old lady died. It's kinda difficult for the prosecutor to make a case when there's no victim around to press charges or testify."

"Murder victims never press charges or testify," Hastings pointed out.

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"Murder?" A puzzled wildness entered Brubaker's eyes. Deal moved between him and the door.

"Edna Croft died of heat stroke," Hastings said. "My photograph shows her window the way the social worker says she left it—open. When Edna Croft was discovered unconscious in that oven of a room, her window was closed. She couldn't have gotten out of bed to close it even if she'd wanted to. You closed it behind you on your way out, which resulted in her death. Causing a death during the commission of a felony is second-degree murder. And that's what I'm placing you under arrest for—murder." He began informing Brubaker of his rights, reciting from memory.

Brubaker bolted for the open window to the fire escape. Deal hit him behind the knees with a shoulder in a perfect flying tackle. Brubaker grunted and dropped hard, his upper body slamming against the window sill. Deal dragged him back to the center of the room and handcuffed him just as Hastings was finishing his recitation.

It was a neatly tied package, Deal thought, lifting Brubaker to his feet. Hastings' photograph and statement would substantiate the social worker's testimony and the stolen television set would be the kind of hard physical evidence a jury couldn't ignore. And it was all possible because Hastings had compared his photograph with the report stating that Edna Croft's window was closed when she was discovered dying.

With the television set loaded into the trunk of the patrol car, Deal drove them back to the precinct house. As they pulled into the garage with their prisoner, he noticed several TV-news vans parked nearby. He let Hastings lead the subdued Brubaker toward the stairs to the booking area where the press would be congregated, then as they were almost to the steps he called Hastings' name and both men turned.

"Hold that pose," Deal said, aiming Hastings' camera at policeman and prisoner. *Snick, whir. "One* of you is gonna like this picture!"

Hastings smiled handsomely even though he knew there was no film in the camera. Just to get in the practice.

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by Allen J. Hubin

The model anthology—how might it be described? Perhaps like this: a collection of tales which fully illuminates a form or explores a theme, using quality stories seldom anthologized, accompanied by insightful commentary.

The Black Mask Boys (Morrow, $16.95), edited by William F. Nolan, brilliantly satisfies these criteria. The eight stories are by pillars of that premier pulp magazine, *Black Mask* (1923–1951): Hammett, Chandler, Gardner, Horace McCoy, Carroll John Daly, Frederick Nebel, Raoul Whitfield, and Paul Cain. Five stories have never been reprinted before and two have been out of print since the 1940s. And the analysis of the hard-boiled detective story and history of the magazine are so incisive this book is going on my reference shelves, a place of honor awarded no more than a half handful of anthologies before.

Tony Hillerman's series about Jim Chee, Navajo tribal policeman in New Mexico, is one of the most penetrating evocations of a subculture in mystery fiction, perhaps rivaled only by Arthur W. Upfield's novels about Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte and Australian aborigines. Hillerman continues his account with *The Ghostway* (Harper & Row, $13.95), in which Chee has a corpse (Navajo, laid out according to the Indian code— almost) and a missing man (also Navajo, vanished from his hogan in very unNavajo fashion). This is somehow tied to the arrest of a mobster in Los Angeles, the hiding of someone under the Federal Witness Protection Program, and a Navajo teenager Chee can't seem to catch up with or hang onto when he does. While he's pursuing these matters, he's also doing battle with himself about giving up his Indianness, and contributing to the dying out of Navajo ways, for the love of Mary Landon. Very impressive storytelling.

Jolly and crafty is *Come Back, Alice Smythereene!* (St. Martin's, $12.95), the debut of the pseudonymous N. J. McIver. Arnold Simon makes minimum wage as a professor of literature in New York. To buttress the exchequer, he wrote some cerebral detective stories under a pseudonym, but that market dried up. Then he hit the jackpot as "Alice Smythereene," author of steamy romances. His identity is a well kept secret, of course, since his readership might boggle at the notion of a middle-aged male academic who isn't even romantic enough to keep his marriage together. So a prodigiously endowed lady appears publicly as Alice to satisfy the panting public. All very tidy until the lady disappears, Simon's agent can't be found, another of his agent's authors, a generator of soft porn, is murdered, and someone seems to want the inoffensive

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Arnold dead as well. Quite accomplished for a first novel.

Of Laurence Payne's three novels about actor-turned-investigator Mark Savage, *Take the Money and Run* (Doubleday, $11.95) is the first to appear here. And welcome it is, a nicely baffling tale of intrigue. Savage offices in London, but a client coyly hires him to deliver a package to a person in Wales. Seems a bit of nonsense, actually, to Savage, but matters look up in Dyfed when he succumbs to a fetching lady veterinarian. They look down when folks start using him for target practice. Dander on the rise, he starts haring around the countryside dodging death and hunting the why and who. The plot, on sober reflection, is fetched from afar, but during the unfolding it carries the reader along quite comfortably.

Deadly Objectives (Walker, $13.95) is L. A. Taylor's third mystery and second about J. J. Jamison, Minneapolis software engineer and self-appointed exposer of alleged extraterrestrial phenomena. Here "Aunt Yuk," a revolutionary device created by his employer, is purloined on a flight to California. The company's future is at stake, so J.J. and a cohort (a certifiable computer jock) poke around. Then J.J.'s wife delivers a cryptic message by phone and vanishes with their young son: it seems dangerous to ask about missing hardware. This is an attractive story, with a notably pyrotechnic ending.

Dick Francis has regularly achieved bestsellerdom with his novels in recent years, based mostly on the excellence and intensity of his narratives, and on the depth of feeling he invests in his protagonists. *Proof* (Putnam, $16.95), his latest, maintains this lofty standard. It combines the usual horse-racing theme with a knowledgeable and fully integrated review of the making of wine and spirits and of the opportunities for fraud and mayhem attendant such enterprise.

Tony Beach is a wine merchant whose clients include the horsey set. One beautiful Sunday, multiple death attends a party where he's dispensing potables. Among the dead is the owner of an inn which seems to have dispensed whiskey not matching the labels on its bottles. Policemen hover about the party incident, more policemen—and an engaging private investigator—buzz about the fraudulent booze. And Beach, with his educated palate, discerns things it is demonstrably fatal to know.

Joseph Hansen's polished and expressive style is most enjoyably evident in the five tales in *Brandstetter and Others* (Foul Play Press, $12.95). Two of the stories feature Dave Brandstetter, California insurance investigator and Hansen's series sleuth. Another, "The Anderson Boy," was recently anthologized as one of the best short crime stories of the year. The longest and most memorable is "Willow's Money," not a mystery at all but a wrenching account of the agonies of several kinds of love.

The fifth Inspector Richard Jury novel by Martha Grimes is *Jerusalem Inn* (Little Brown, $15.95),

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gemlike in atmosphere and prose. Jury, trudging through the village of Washington on a late December day, comes across a woman in difficulty, gives her a hand, has tea with her at her cottage, and on departing leaves behind a small bit of his heart. Next time he sees her she's dead, poisoned. It's not his case, really, but it is his heart, and his inquiries lead to the titular inn, warm and inviting and English to the core. They lead also to snowbound Spinney Abbey, home of a famous critic, where a houseparty, including death, has gathered for the Christmas festivities. Not on any account to be missed.

John Collee, English doctor turned freelance scriptwriter, offers *Kingsley's Touch* (St. Martin's, $12.95), a first novel which is part mystery, part mysticism, part horror, all absorbing suspense. Alistair Kingsley practices at an old hospital in Edinburgh, specializing in the treatment of cancer. An Indian mystic, also trained as a doctor, descends upon the hospital and upon Kingsley, claiming to see in Alistair the fulfilment of a prophecy. For a time Kingsley discovers that his touch produces miraculous remissions in his patients. Until the mystic is driven away, not to return until death opens the door. A remarkable story.

Michael Gilbert is one of my favorites in our field, and though perhaps his writing doesn't now have the stunning impact of earlier days it's certainly much more than satisfactory. And he hasn't repeated himself, instead heaping freshness upon freshness over the years. As in the case of *The Long Journey Home* (Harper & Row, $13.95). Here an Englishman of forty summers, having sold his computer company for a considerable sum and inadvertently arranging to be thought dead, finds himself repairing farm vehicles in rural Italy and enjoying every minute of it. Until, that is, murder, connected with his business past, reaches out and consumes his joy in flames. Some multinationalists are about to discover they've touched the wrong man with their uncaring schemes. To be read with pleasure.

I've thought the early Inspector Luke Thanet novels by Dorothy Simpson quite competent but rather unfeeling: emotions were described but not engaged. *Close Her Eyes* (Scribners, $12.95) remedies that and is much the stronger for it. Here a teenage girl goes missing. Her parents, members of a dour religious sect, keep a grey, unlived-in house and dress their only child in dowdy. Her father, stern and unbending, rejects any notion that his missing child is anything other than the plain perfection he raised her to be. Thanet, feeling the need to know her better to find her, studies her life, her only friend, her aunt and uncle (who are also of the sect but not thereby kept from sinning). The picture that emerges is of a very different girl. A taut story, with the workings of pain and pride, of anger and determination, well revealed.

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Much as Will Lester hated parties, he'd agreed to let Sara Jo throw this god-awful shindig because it was a good chance to get a lot of townfolk together and look them over. He had been tracking a local thief for five years without once finding a solid trail. Even if he didn't get any new leads, whatever goodwill came out of it couldn't hurt.

Dixie L. Smith attended Lindenwood Colleges in St. Charles, Missouri, and currently lives in Charleston, West Virginia, with her husband and two children. She and Helen Carper (see page 81) are members of the St. Albans Writers Group . . .

A SOIREE OF SUSPECTS

by DIXIE L. SMITH

The residents of the small Midwestern town were beginning to turn away from Will Lester, some out of embarrassment, some out of righteous anger. The local gossip mill was using him for grist. He'd heard the comments himself. What kind of sheriff tracks a thief for five years without once finding a solid trail? What sort of sheriff sits on his butt in the squad car while his friends and neighbors are robbed of their hard-earned cash? Worst of all were the none-too-subtle hints that maybe his mind wasn't as sharp as it once was, that maybe it was time for him to step aside and let the deputy have a crack at being sheriff. After all, the robberies never occurred on *his* shift.

Like hell he'd resign and turn the department over to Richard Sanderson! That boy might have his head stuffed full of book-learning and might be right up to snuff on the latest police procedures, but Will didn't set any stock by such nonsense. Sanderson was smart, no doubt about it—maybe even smart enough to be committing the robberies himself just to get the town riled enough to bounce Will

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out on his ear!—but when it came to the experience that made for a good officer, Sanderson was green as grass.

Like last summer, for instance. Art Powell's daughter had been driving her father's Ford pickup home from play practice at about 10:00 P.M. and hadn't been paying attention to the road like she should. When a call came over the radio that the girl had smashed the truck headlong into a telephone pole, Sanderson was on patrol less than a mile away and was the first to respond to the call. Will had arrived a few minutes later to find the girl dead in the middle of the road and Sanderson off in the bushes puking his guts out. He hadn't even moved the body to the side of the road or as much as covered her up and tried to keep oncoming traffic from running her over. But did people remember that kind of thing when they talked about putting Sanderson in charge? Did they remember that the fool had caught a college kid at a gas station with half a pound of marijuana in his possession and had let the kid slip it to one of his buddies, who had proceeded to flush it down the toilet in the restroom before he realized what had happened? You could bet your life they didn't.

You could bet, too, that Will Lester wasn't about to resign under the pressure. He'd always worked best when things got rough and he would this time, too. There was still a whole year until the next election and he'd turn the damned town inside out between now and then. He'd been too easy in the past, that was the trouble. Well, no more. Every last member of the community was going to be treated as a prime suspect from now on, including Deputy Dick Sanderson.

That was part of the reason he'd agreed to let Sara Jo throw this god-awful shinding tonight. Much as he hated parties, it was a good chance to get a lot of the townfolk together and look them over. Even if he didn't get any new leads, whatever goodwill came out of it couldn't hurt. But Will was just a snatch disappointed in the turnout, though most of the no-shows had given pretty good reasons for missing the party. Larry Davids and his wife Kate had had to go out of town to see their new grandbaby. Watt and Emma Lowenburg were tied up at a bowling tournament in the capital. And Ethel Godfrey was laid up with another bout of her arthritis.

Will's wife had thought of postponing the party until Ethel was better. The shindig would be a social failure without her, she told Will, and Ethel had paid twenty dollars for a new dress just for the party. That didn't bother Will a bit. Ethel had enough moolah to buy ten new dresses with hats to match. Anyway, from the few times

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Will had been forced to deal with Ethel Godfrey, he'd come to the conclusion the woman was twice as mean as she looked, and she looked meaner than a rattlesnake in spring.

Will still couldn't see why all the ladies of the area felt they had to have Ethel's approval for every little thing they did, but he supposed it had something to do with the fact that she really made a person wonder if he wanted her as an enemy. Even with her best friends, few as they actually were, she had a nasty way of getting even when she thought she'd been wronged. More than one of the ladies had bought a hat or a scarf or a pair of gloves a mite too similar to Ethel's only to have them sat on, snagged, or stolen. And lord knows Ethel didn't take it kindly when Sandra Chatam announced one night at circle that she had finally saved enough money to buy her new Bentwood rocker, either, but she really brightened up the next day when Sandra reported the cash missing. Nope, old Ethel's bout of arthritis keeping her from the party didn't bother Will one bit.

What did bother Will just a tad was that Doc Osaka and his wife had taken off for Tokyo to visit the missus' relatives. Not only was Doc highly respected in the community, he was an important part of it as well. His golfing buddies were the most influential men in town and his bank account allowed him to swap spit with the country-club set.

It was generally hard to tell what Osaka was thinking, him being foreign and all, but Will was certain that Doc didn't hold him in very high regard. He'd been robbed twice now and the second time he'd been a little ugly when Will had failed to come up with a suspect. He'd been even uglier when Will had caught his son shoplifting at Andley's store just a week ago. From what Osaka had had to say *that* day, he just might be one of those behind the move to put Sanderson in the sheriff's uniform. Anyway, it wouldn't have hurt to cozy up to him a little at the party to get back in his good graces, but what couldn't be helped wasn't worth worrying about, so Will didn't.

As usual, Savannah McClenin had stationed herself in the center of the room and was giving her Southern Belle routine a real workout. Her hair was piled on her head all soft-like and a silk magnolia blossom was hooked behind one ear. Will's wife had once told him that those flowers cost six dollars apiece and that Savannah kept at least a half dozen on hand all the time. Such recklessness with

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money was hard for Will to understand, but then Savannah herself was hard for Will to understand.

Will didn't know a whole heck of a lot about Savannah when it got right down to it. She'd fluttered into town six years back, claiming to be Nettie Watkins' only living kin. Since no one knew any different, and since Nettie herself was laid out in a black box at Ord's Funeral Home, no one had stopped Savannah from taking over the Watkins homeplace and turning it into a miniature Tara. How she'd financed it, Will couldn't guess. Old Tom Watkins had never had two nickels to rub together, and when he died Nettie had had it plenty hard. Whatever money Savannah had hadn't come from the Watkins, that much Will knew. And it hadn't come from hard work, either.

Not that Will thought Savannah was the thief—he didn't. His sixth sense about such things told him Savannah would cover her cheeks in shame at the mere *thought* of such a deed. But what she might do was hint at the pitiful financial plight she found herself in and Will could think of at least seven men that would rob their own mothers for one honey-dipped word of appreciation from those scarlet lips.

Two of those men were Josh and Jim Arnold. They were standing one on either side of Savannah, their identical faces wearing identical leers. The Arnolds seemed unaware that the men groveling at Savannah's feet were making a united effort to exclude them from the conversation, but the Arnold twins had a lot of experience at ignoring being ignored.

Life was funny, Will thought. After they'd inherited their father's law firm, Will had expected Josh and Jim to be on the top of the social heap. They were, after all, two decent-looking, unmarried, rich lawyers, a combination that was pretty hard to find in a small town. It hadn't happened, though. The townsfolk had refused to include the twins in anything. Not only had they not been included, they had been actively excluded. Just last month they had shown up at the annual pig-roast with three well fatted piglets to contribute only to be told that their offer was kind but not needed.

Will had no reason to suspect the Arnolds above anyone else, but he did. There was something sneaky about them, he could just feel it. And he might be right about his hunch, too, by golly, but it'd take a little more digging to be sure.

About a month ago, Will had gone to see Josh about an out-of-town case that he had to testify on and had spied a brown split-

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leather money bag half buried beneath a stack of paper. Will had pulled it out and asked Josh about it, but before Josh could respond Jim had snatched the bag away and said it had been their father's and they kept it for sentimental reasons. Will had just nodded and kept his mouth shut tight. No way was he about to tell either of the twins that the pouch looked a lot like the one Ben Adams had reported missing last fall. Let them find out if and when he had a strong case against them. The Arnolds knew too much about the law for Will to take a chance of tipping his hand.

A blur of movement from the other side of the room drew Will's attention. There, he noticed right off, George Land was sitting on the edge of the sofa, nodding his head vigorously, a complete contradiction to what Will had come to expect from the man. Land was, and had been forever, a loner. The two hundred acres of Iochief corn he cultivated kept him too busy to socialize, and as he had told Will often enough the only way he could stay on good terms with his neighbors was to stay away from them.

That alone was enough to make Will wonder why George had come to the party. Why he had stayed nearly two hours past full-dark was a total mystery. Still, the other farmers, equally withdrawn and every bit as strict about turning in at sundown, hadn't made a move to leave yet, either. The only thing Will could figure was that they had lost track of the time talking about some new strain of hybrid corn or the dropping price of grain-fed beef. Or what sort of a sheriff Richard Sanderson would make.

Will struck that thought from his mind as soon as it formed. All the farmers, but George Land in particular, had been the most loyal supporters a man could ever hope to have. For the past three years, part of George's corn crop had been lost to smut, but even with financial trouble staring him smack in the face George was concerned about others. Not once had Will run into George but what the man had taken the time and interest to ask how the investigation was going and if there were any new leads in the case. When Will told him no, all he ever heard from George were the words of encouragement he needed so badly.

And who knew? Maybe George was right. Maybe all a body *did* have to do was leave the trap out long enough, or move it often enough, for even the smartest fox to stumble into it. And if he was wrong, well, George Land's loyalty counted for a whole lot all by itself. The man wasn't out telling people that Sanderson would make a better sheriff than Will. And he wasn't out robbing his neighbors,

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either—Will would gladly stake what remained of his reputation on that.

A gentle nudge and a tiny nod from Sara Jo reminded Will that he was the host of this get-together and he hadn't as much as said "Boo" to the ladies yet. Feeling a pinch guilty, Will moved toward the piano.

The ladies' singing made his teeth hurt, which wasn't anything new. The Widow Simpson was in the lead and dogs had actually been known to congregate outside the church and howl when she soloed at the services. Her voice wasn't all that awful—it was just old and creaky, like everything else about her. And Agnes Pauley was caterwauling at the top of her lungs. When Will had been little more than a twinkle in his father's eyes he'd heard someone say that Maude Pauley couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. He hadn't understood the phrase then, but now when he heard Maude's daughter Agnes sing it made perfect sense. Maude couldn't carry a tune in a bucket with a lid on it.

Still, for all they couldn't sing worth anything, there weren't two finer ladies to be found anywhere than the Widow Simpson and Agnes Pauley. When a death occurred, or a family was burned out, or when a body just plain needed help to make it through a bad time, all Will had to do was pick up the phone. The ladies took it from there. He'd seen them organize an after-burial dinner for relatives, a clean-up crew, or a steady but shushed-up flow of cash and food in less than an hour. When anyone went on vacation, it was Agnes or the Widow that was called to pick up mail, water plants, and feed family pets. And it wasn't uncommon for people to return from vacation to find the ladies had not only done what was asked of them but had cleaned house, washed clothes, cooked a meal, and put flowers on the kitchen table. But what Will thought of them most kindly for was that both ladies had been known to slip him a fiver for "that poor little tyke" now and again.

That poor little tyke was six-year-old Andy Lyon, whose mother was standing directly behind Agnes Pauley. Shirley Lyon had had it hard all her life. Her mother had been a cheap little cookie that had gotten herself pregnant by Homer Burton III. Shirley's mom wasn't the first girl he'd gotten into trouble, but she was the first to name young Homer as the father and then leave her newborn baby on his parents' doorstep. They hadn't had a heck of a lot of choice but to claim Shirley as their own.

But Shirley being family hadn't made the Burtons any happier

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about being stuck with her. They'd mistreated her from the beginning. Nothing illegal—just cruel, mean little things. Will had always thought that was why Shirley had latched onto Jim Lyon so fast. He was the first man to pay her any attention. 'Course, the attention he paid her brought nothing but shame when she was forced to try to pass Andy off as a premature, but even then Shirley had done herself proud. She'd held her chin up and smiled right through all the whispers.

And she was still holding her chin up and smiling. If she'd been hurt over the gossip when Jim got fired for drinking on the job, or when Sara Croft had a baby that was the spittin' image of Jim, or when Jim got himself arrested for assault, Shirley hadn't let it show. And no, Shirley Lyon wouldn't consider stealing no matter how much she needed money to feed and clothe little Andy. And try as he might, Will hadn't been able to pin the thing on her husband, either. Much as he thought throwing Jim in the slammer would be the kindest thing he could do for Shirley.

Sara Jo came by to offer refreshments to the singers and Will could have hugged her for putting a stop to the racket. Little things aside, she was a pretty darned good wife. Even Mattie Long would have to dig pretty deep to come up with any dirt on Sara Jo. No one, Will thought, had ever seen her go to the grocery store in curlers, show up at the annual potluck with a cheap dish, or say an unkind word in public about anyone. At home she could put the screws to a lot of people with that sassy tongue of hers, but in all Will was happy with her. She was never too busy to have a little fun after the boys went to bed and she always managed to have a hot meal waiting when he got off work.

She was even able to keep the boys quiet so he could hear what Sanderson was saying when he made his report over the radio every day, and that wasn't an easy thing to accomplish. The few times she'd had to be gone when Dick radioed in, Will could barely hear a word the man said and had to really yell to make himself heard back to Dick. Will couldn't say much for her figure, though. Giving birth to the three boys, all of them nine-pounders, had done something to her shape and, try as she had, it just wasn't what it used to be. Still, he wasn't one to complain. Not many could beat her cherry pie and he doubted that another wife in the whole county looked cuter in a skimpy nightie than *his* wife did, huggy-bear handles and all.

Sara Jo felt Will's eyes on her and turned to him with a smile. He

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really was being a good sport about having to entertain all these people. Oh, he'd complained about it plenty beforehand, but she'd just insisted, knowing he'd come around.

Sometimes she needed to do things like this to keep her sanity. It wasn't easy living in such a small town, especially when you hadn't grown up in it. Though she'd lived here for over ten years she still felt like an outsider at times. Part of it came from being the sheriff's wife—she knew that and accepted it. Being Mrs. Will Lester was a responsibility and she tried to live up to it, but it sure wasn't easy. She had to sit through hundreds of charity fund-raisers, attend parties she didn't want to go to, and show up in church every Sunday no matter how tired she was.

That part of it she could handle fairly well. What she didn't handle so well was trying to maintain the standard of living that was expected of her on Will's pitiful income. The boys were growing up fast. Soon they'd be off to college and where was the money for that supposed to come from? The two-and-a-half-percent raise they'd voted in for Will at the last election? That didn't even cover the extra food the boys ate when they went on growing spurts like two of them were doing right now!

Sara Jo felt the thought go off in her head like a bomb. She had spent tomorrow's grocery money on the food for the party and hadn't replaced it yet. Lord, if she didn't get to the store first thing in the morning, the boys wouldn't even have milk for their cereal.

Well, there was no help for it. This time she'd just have to go out on Sanderson's shift even though he changed his mind a hundred times an hour about what part of town he'd cover. From what he'd radioed in earlier, he was planning, as of tonight, to spend the morning on the west side of town so he could keep an eye on the sale at Ferguson's used-car lot.

If she hurried, and if Dick stuck to his plans, she just might be able to drive out real early and find where Osaka had hidden his extra cash this time, stop by the store for milk, and be home in time to fix the boys a good breakfast. The rest of the grocery shopping would have to wait until later when it was proper to be out and about, but surely no one would talk about her for going out early for a gallon of milk for the children's breakfast. Would they?

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "SECOND STORIES"

The St. Albans Writers Group to which both Helen Carper and Dixie L. Smith belong is centered in St. Albans, West Virginia, not St. Albans, England, where Ian Stuart (see page 47) makes his home. Here's to all writers and to all St. Albans everywhere . . .

THE WOMAN WHO OWNED GOD

by HELEN CARPER

If you ask me—and Sheriff Bateman, he just keeps askin' and askin'—Hallie Bryant killed Docie Kincaid. But I don't know nothin' for certain. Never seen a thing.

The way I figure it, Docie had been a settin' herself up for it. Strange thing, too. Good Christian woman like Docie oughtn't to a been so disliked. Wasn't a person on the ridge more blessed by God than Docie, and Docie never let nobody forget it. Reckon she might a carried that possibility stuff too far.

Short little dumpling of a woman with fat red cheeks—that was Docie. Always a laughin' an tellin' everbody what a nice day it was, even when it was a rainin'. Didn't nobody's chickens lay more eggs than Docie's. And she got more money for them at the store 'cause they was brown.

Handy in the house, too, Docie was. Didn't no tough piecrust come out a Docie's kitchen. Made the prettiest quilts you ever saw. Even won a prize for one of 'em at that there culture center Arch Moore built down in Charleston—that big buildin' that Jay Rockefeller took away from him when he was elected governor. But it was the prize she won for her quilted altar-cloth that got her in bad with Hallie. Hallie had her heart set on a winnin' that altar-cloth prize. It would be her gift to the Lord, so to speak.

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Some people with Docie's blessin's might a laid some of 'em to luck, humblelike. Take that oil well on her property. When Gabe Phillips sold that piece a land to Docie, she wasn't a buyin' lessen he let the minerals go along with it. Everbody knowed that well was dry as dust. Danged if here don't come along South Penn with some new notion, and afore you know it that ole well makes Docie enough money to buy the saucer that brings the possibility feller—Shiller, is it?—in on the TV. Paid $3,000 for that saucer, too. But Docie wouldn't have it that she was lucky.

It was the Lord, Docie said. Said the Lord was a workin' and a upliftin' in her life. Seemed like Docie had a hammerlock on the Lord after she took up with the TV and He just done whatever she wanted Him to do.

Worried me a mite, it did. Used to talk to Docie about it. She'd just get all excited and her red cheeks would get redder and her eyes would get all moist and shiny. "Anythin' is possible, Jed. Anythin'. Just have to believe it will happen, and it happens. Faith. That's what pleases God, Jed."

Now Docie had always done pretty good without faith to my way a thinkin'. I'd always reckoned she was just kinda smart and handy-like. But when she started makin' them possibility lists and a believin' anythin' she wanted she was a gonna get, her grain a mustard seed just swelled to appallin' proportions. Course, she fertilized it ever Sunday morning when that Shiller feller started droppin' his piles a potential.

Didn't hardly believe some a that stuff she told. Seemed like that Shiller had built a twenty-milllion-dollar glass church out there in California just on believin' he could. I didn't believe no such thing myself, till Docie invited me over to see Shiller in the flesh on the TV. Had to believe my own eyes. There was that crystal palace big as life—the one Docie'd quilted into her winnin' altar cloth. And there's Shiller a stompin' around among all them lights and so many flowers you'd a thought somebody was laid out. And a grinnin' at you all the time he was a preachin'. Never did trust a preacher that grins at you whilest he's a tellin' you about hell fire and damnation. Makes a feller uneasy. Course, Shiller just talks about possibilities and none of the consequences.

Docie, she didn't have no doubts a tall. Not *a* tall. She set out to become the best quilter on the ridge—with God's help, a course. Reckon He was a unwindin' the thread. Started kickin' up some sand among the women folks, let me tell you. Hallie Bryant was the

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queen a the quilters afore Docie took the title, and women liked Hallie.

But Docie had scented money in it when them Vista people—Jay was one of 'em afore he got into politics—worked their way back up here and set up a quiltin' workshop. Took the stuff to Charleston and even on to New York. Then they started them state-wide competitions for the best quilts and set up a exhibit at the culture center. Give cash money for the best quilt, too. Docie even got her picture in the newspaper the year she won it.

Didn't have sense enough to keep her mouth shut, though.

"I'm just so grateful," she went around a tellin' people. And she'd number her blessings till it might to a soured your stomach. Docie just never did seem to get the hang a bein' modest in victory. Braggin' don't set well, especially with losers. But you couldn't tell her nothin'.

Actually, it seemed like she wanted enemies, just craved 'em like. Docie even rewrote her favorite Bible verse to suit herself, but then lots of folks do that. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for great is their reward," she would say.

"In heaven, Docie, in heaven," somebody would complete the verse, but Docie's mind had shut it off at *reward*.

Iffin you could a straightened out Docie's business arrangements with the Lord, and I believe I untangled Docie's thinkin' on the matter to my satisfaction, she *wanted* people to mistreat her so she could be blessed and they could be punished. But the mote is sometimes in the eye of the beholder. That's in the good book, too. Reckon Docie just kind of read selectively like.

But Docie was beyond bein' reasoned with. "Got to give God the glory, Jed."

And she did. Just gloried all over the place. Just fat cowpiles of glory whilest she watched people's faces to see how folks who didn't have God a walkin' right along side of 'em was a takin' it. Didn't nobody else on the ridge have any a them blessings. But didn't nobody else have Shiller, neither.

The sheriff is a pokin' and a proddin' all around Docie's living room. " 'Bout a twelve-gauge gun that done it, wouldn't you say, Jed?"

"A lot a them on the ridge," I say, carefullike.

Whoever had done it had been here a waitin' for her, I figured. Waitin' kind of in them shadows over there, and when Docie stepped

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through the door let her have it. Just scattered Docie. Shame to ruin that pretty quilt Docie had in the frame. Wedding-ring pattern, looks like.

"Yeah, I know there's a lot of twelve-gauge guns on the ridge. Know some other things about this murder, Jed Pierce. What I don't know—yet—is who done it."

Sheriff, he's 'bout half holler and half town. Growed up over on Trace Fork and went away to the University. Got him some book learnin', but his tongue forgets its education when he's riled.

"Don't a squirrel fall on this ridge without you a knowin' it, Jed. You got this case all figured out and filed. That's why I asked you to come over here."

It's the town half that thinks I'd tell him anythin'.

He's a dustin' some stuff all over the place now. Fingerprints, I reckon. "Everbody on this ridge been in here, Sheriff, to see the TV. How's fingerprints gonna help you?"

"Help me when I find the gun. You wouldn't know anythin' about that gun, would you, Jed?"

I pretty much knowed it was a twelve-gauge. That's all Hallie's got. But I don't put no words to it.

"Reckon he might a done it?"

Sheriff motions to Burl Lee Looney, Docie's nephew and next-of-kin.

Burl Lee had come a runnin', a course, when he heard the news. Don't seem to be a takin' it very hard. He is glued to the TV and don't to all appearances even know we're in the room.

Great balls a fire! Naked women! Ain't any possibility feller on that there screen now! Burl Lee's eyes is all bugged out and it looks like he's a gonna climb right into the TV. Burl Lee is all set to go a whorin' after strange women, anybody can see that.

"Get outta here!" The sheriff is a yellin' at Burl Lee and no wonder. "Ain't you got any respect for the dead?"

Burl Lee sidles toward the door. He's all red and hot and lookin' back at the TV. "This is my place now, Sheriff—I got a right to be here."

Somebody ought to a taught Burl Lee not to whine, among other things. The sheriff closes the door hard behind Burl Lee and drifts toward the TV set. He whistles long and low and plants himself between the naked women and the window where Burl Lee has his face pressed up tight against the glass. The sheriff contemplates the wriggling backside of a blonde for a full minute, then switches to

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another channel. That Mondale feller, who's done got his mind set on runnin' against Ronald Reagan for President, he's a tellin' how he's gonna outshine somebody named Hart next week in the New York primary. The sheriff snorts and turns back to the blonde. They's a pretty little butterfly tattooed on her butt and the sheriff reaches over and pats it afore he turns off the TV. I'm a watchin' Burl Lee's face and it just kinda curls up into a sob.

Jay, he promised all kind a roads when he whipped the tar outta Arch Moore. Hain't done none of it. That's why me and mine'll vote for Jay come November's election. Politicians and polecats has got a lot in common, I reckon, and a polecat that don't pay you no mind don't do you no harm. Been a good governor to my way a thinkin'. We'll just help him spraddleleg it on over to Washington. Don't want no roads in here.

You have to watch that Sheriff Bateman—like he's a readin' my mind. That's the holler half.

"Don't think," he's a sayin', " 'cause you don't have no roads in here that we won't find the one that done this." He removes the spattered quilt from the quiltin' frame and wraps it in a piece a canvas. "And don't think whoever it is is just gonna fade into the brush back yonder. We'll borrow the governor's helicopter and ferret him out."

His eyes is narrer and mean. Sheriff don't like to be crossed, and he figures I'm a crossin' him. Don't blame him none. Reckon I'd feel the same way iffin I was in his shoes.

That copter thing, now. Don't much like the idee a that. But reckon I don't need to worry none. Jay Rockefeller, he's a windin' up for another go-round in the tar patch, and he'll need that copter. Don't know why he spends so much money to win a election that ain't no contest. Guess the rich just like to spend money 'cause they got it. Spent twelve million, some say, to beat Arch Moore. Twelve million.

"I knowed ye'd come, Jed Pierce."

Hallie is a settin' on her front porch in the cane-bottom chair she keeps by the door. Settin' straight but kind a relaxedlike. Her grey hair is pulled back and up under the old black slouch hat she wears when she works in her garden. Beside her chair on the floor there's a go-away bundle and a pair of waders. On her lap the family Bible is open to some underlined verses. I don't have to ask what they are—I know. Genesis 4: 3–5.

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"Ain't nobody got a right to own God, Jed. He's a walkin' free out there again for everbody." Her eyes are as clear as a brook. Ain't no regret there.

"Careful, Hallie," I warn and settle onto the edge of the porch.

"I'll be a wanderer, Jed, all the rest a my life."

Hallie's got her a right nice cabin here—be hard on her to leave it, I'm a thinkin'. And then there's that tin-roofed shed and the forge where Hallie does her smithin'. Ain't nobody in these hills can't do a little metal work. Looks like they's still some heat a risin' from that forge.

"Been smithin', Hallie?"

"A mite, Jed."

Reckon Sheriff Bateman can forget about that gun.

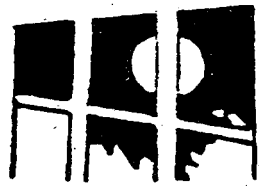
"Do you have to leave, Hallie? 'Pears to me like it might be safe to stay."

"I thought about that, Jed. Reckon I want to go—hit's my punishment."

"Well, if you're a goin', Hallie, you ought not to wait. Sheriff says he might borry the governor's copter. But I 'low that's braggin'."

"I ain't afraid a no helicopter back there." Hallie waves to the mountains that rise behind her cabin and overlap into the mist. They're thick with brush and crossed with cricks and hollers and she's got kin livin' up there somewhere. It wouldn't be easy to find nobody there didn't want to be found, I'll tell you that.

Just the same, it ain't right. Reckon I've got to change my mind 'bout that Cain feller. Abel must a been a lot like Docie—mighty aggravatin'. Reckon he was the injured party, Cain was. Iffin I'd been on that jury it'd a been justifiable homicide, I'll tell you that. The Lord, though, he don't call me for jury duty.



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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

A delectable concoction—vintage George Baxt and full of his wicked, wicked, wonderful, wonderful ways . . .

THE WOMAN WHO CRIED WOLF

by GEORGE BAXT

Oliver Thompson sat facing his wife in the booth of a vastly overpriced New York restaurant, wondering if some scientist would ever find a cure for hypochondria. Over cocktails, Marion couldn't understand why Oliver wasn't noticing her shortness of breath. Her whining brought about his shortness of temper, which he succeeded in holding in check. The appetizer was accompanied by a series of short gasps, known to her intimates as Marion gasps and the signal for a slight attack of angina. With the fish there was a gentle reprimand to Oliver for not noticing the slight rash on her chin. Perhaps, thought Oliver, she'd been shaving too close. The roast beef was perfectly pink, and not too runny with blood, and Oliver held his breath, expecting Marion to start dwelling on anthrax, but she was chewing away with an abstract expression on her face.

Fifteen years, thought Oliver as he mashed his baked potato with butter, sour cream, and chives. Fifteen years he had been married to this woman, and for fifteen years, beginning with their disastrous wedding night, she'd never stoped insisting she was the victim of some dreaded disease or illness. There were times when he suspected she hoarded plans to explore foreign, isolated territories in search of new diseases to fill the void where cancer and leprosy now brought

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on yawns of boredom. God knows she could afford it. She could easily organize expeditions to northern Tibet in search of some new form of Yak fever or to outermost Siberia to excavate in the frozen wilds for some strain of illness lying dormant lo these many centuries, patiently awaiting the arrival of Marion Diswald (behind her back before she married it was "Dismal") to reawaken it and lay scourge to her—but only her. Let the other millions of hypochondriacs find their *own* diseases.

"My fingers hurt," said Marion.

"All of them?" asked Oliver, his voice patient and as bland as the small island of mashed baked potato adjoining his cut of beef.

Marion glared at him. "Louise Hergesheimer developed gangrene of the fingers and had six of them amputated."

"Mrs. Hergesheimer, as I recall, is a gardener. I'm sure I read somewhere a green thumb can be infectious."

"That's not funny. Louise is diabetic. It was a bad manicure that did it."

"Marion, you are not diabetic."

No, she wasn't diabetic, but he had a suspicion she was saving that for their next anniversary.

"You're never sympathetic when I don't feel well. You're never sympathetic at all. You just make unkind and cruel jests, like those unkind and cruel jests in all those short stories of yours you never sell."

Oliver didn't have to look at his knuckles. He knew they were a ghostly white. He could feel the nerve in his right eyelid beginning to work and he did his best to control it, not wishing to give the woman sitting across from him the satisfaction of knowing she had drawn blood. He looked at her steadily and said, "You're not looking at all well."

Marion's hands froze in midair just slightly twelve degrees above the roast beef. "It's my heart," she whispered. She placed the knife and fork on the table and began massaging an area a few degrees to the north of her left breast. Oliver wondered if the heart extended that far.

"Maybe it's just gas," he suggested.

"No, it's not gas. Gas would make me burp. I want to go home. Take me home. I don't want to die in a restaurant."

"Well, certainly not in this one," said Oliver, "it's so tacky and expensive. I refuse to come here again."

"If you don't get me home soon," said Marion in a voice weaker

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than the tea she took at breakfast, "we'll never dine together again in *any* restaurant. Hurry, Oliver, hurry—"

An hour later, in the master bedroom of their sixteen-room apartment on Fifth Avenue across from Central Park, Marion Thompson lay on the bed while Doctor Irving Labon listened to her heart through his stethoscope. Oliver stood to one side with his arms folded, watching tiny bubbles forming around Marion's mouth.

"Hmmm," said the doctor.

Marion's eyes flew open. "What do you mean by that?"

"By what?"

"By that hmmm! I don't like the sound of it!"

"I don't like the sound of your heart." There was no masking the look of triumph on Marion's face. Although she said nothing, Oliver could read I Told You So on her face. If he outlived her, he decided it would be the epitaph on her tombstone.

"Don't keep anything from me," demanded Marion, her voice newly invigorated. "I can face the worst. I need a bypass, right?"

"Marion, Marion, Marion," said the doctor wearily, wishing he could go home to his wife and children and the television set. "Irregular heartbeats are not unusual. They can be brought on by anxiety, indigestion—"

"She was gulping her food," contributed Oliver, knowing the remark would enrage his wife.

"I *wasn't* gulping my food!" snapped Marion, eyes narrowed and menacing, "I was gasping for air! You said so yourself—you said I wasn't looking well!" The doctor shot a look at Oliver, whose eyes were now directed at a spot slightly to the right of the doctor's head. He zeroed in on his and Marion's wedding photograph, which was prominently displayed on an antique writing desk Marion had purchased at an absurd price from a dealer in Paris while on their honeymoon. Marion was so rich, so enormously rich. He'd been very lucky to win her love and her hand and her hypochondria. He'd been so poor and so tired of being so poor—and so tired of being constantly reminded he was so poor by his best friend, the struggling young intern who was now the tired middle-aged doctor, Irving Labon.

"Marry her, for crying out loud," urged Irving in the luncheonette on lower Madison Avenue where he and Oliver met for lunch when lunches were affordable. "Marry her! We need the money!"

"You're asking me to be a whore," snarled Oliver, those being the days when he had principles.

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"I'm not asking you to be any such thing. One of the world's wealthiest young women is madly in love with you and such an opportunity to cash in could very well never come your way again. Marry her and give me the money to open an office in the rich Upper East Side of New York where I too will meet a wealthy young heiress and never, hopefully, look back."

So Oliver had married Marion, in St. Patrick's Cathedral no less, though it had been rumored her disapproving parents had contemplated wiring the place with dynamite. Irving opened his office and thrived, but no heiress came his way—only a sweet little legal secretary from Westchester with an infection of the inner ear and both won his heart completely.

"You're not listening to Irving!" Oliver heard his wife wailing.

"What did you say, Irving?" asked Oliver.

"I said, to be on the safe side, I want to put Marion into the clinic for extensive tests."

"Anything you say, Irving. You're the expert."

Marion's stay in the clinic was under a week. The tests she was given were extensive and tiresome—especially to Oliver, who had to suffer the litany when he visited. But in under a week, the tests were completed and Marion was sent home in a private ambulance with a private nurse who had a private source of income but privately enjoyed adding to this private source by bullying wealthy patients. It was agreed that the nurse, Miss Wolheim, in her early forties and not too unattractive, would live in with the Thompsons for at least two weeks, or until Marion felt strong enough to look after herself.

"Is your room comfortable?" Oliver asked Miss Wolheim, knowing full well it was lavishly appointed and the furnishings and decorations had cost well up in the ten thousands.

"It'll do," said Miss Wolheim, always prepared to never give an inch.

"And how is my wife doing?" They were having coffee in the kitchen, which was well out of Marion's earshot, being at least half a mile from her bedroom.

"Well, frankly, I think Doctor Labon is underplaying it."

"Underplaying what?"

"Her heart condition."

Oliver had been reaching for a Mallomar which the nurse had thoughtfully arranged among other biscuits on a cut-glass tray, but his hand rested in midair. "I have never known Irving to underplay."

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Miss Wolheim took the Mallomar and wolfed a large bite of it. While chewing, she said, "I know you look upon your wife as an incurable hypochondriac, but let me remind you of the story of the boy who cried wolf."

"You think my wife has cried wolf once too often?"

"I think you need a second opinion—and that's strictly between us, right?"

"Of course. But a second opinion? Why, Irving is my very best friend. I couldn't consult another doctor without telling him."

"I'm not suggesting another doctor. I'm suggesting Flora Daguerre."

"Who is Flora Daguerre?"

"She's a psychic."

"A *psychic?*"

"She's fantastic. She's been written up internationally. Even *New York* magazine is after her. I saw her three weeks ago. She told me I'd be living on Fifth Avenue in very lavish surroundings attending to a very wealthy woman everybody thinks is a hypochondriac. Well, here I am and there—" jerking a thumb over her right shoulder "—she is. I tell you, you go see Flora Daguerre. I can fix an appointment for you real quick, and the sooner the better. Flora gets flown all over the world for consultations and at a very fancy price, I might add."

"How can you afford her?"

Miss Wolheim smiled slyly. "That's for me to know and you to find out."

"If she's so great, how come I never heard of her before?"

"She keeps a profile lower than most. Anyway, you're hearing about her now." She watched Oliver sip his coffee, a thoughtful look on his face.

"A psychic," said Oliver, staring into his coffee cup, where nothing materialized. "Flora Daguerre. Is she French?"

"She's good," said Miss Wolheim. "She's damn good."

Oliver Thompson was not prepared for Flora Daguerre. He had imagined a dumpy little lady with thick-lensed eyeglasses and egg-yolk stains on her wrinkled blouse and sensible shoes with which she took a daily constitutional through her local supermarket. But the Flora Daguerre who entered the consultation room of the five-story brownstone she owned and occupied in the West Eighties was something else again. She was tall, slim, but voluptuous, and some-

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where in her late thirties or early forties with blazing red hair accentuating her eggshell-white skin and luscious red lips that looked as though they could attack unguarded necks with alacrity.

"Is something wrong?" asked Flora as Oliver stared at her with a mixture of undisguised astonishment and lust.

"You're the psychic," said Oliver as he took her hand and gently shook it.

"I'm a psychic, not a mind reader."

"Is there anything special you'd like me to do?" asked Oliver.

"Just sit." They sat, she in a chair near her desk, he sinking slightly ungracefully into an overstuffed armchair that exhaled as he settled. She stared at him. He stared back, quite happy to spend the session just staring at her.

"You are not a happy man. You have not been a happy man for fifteen years. Not since you married."

Although she was right, Oliver thought it necessary to defend himself. "I haven't been all *that* unhappy."

"Yes, you have. Don't fight it. Let me tell you what I see. That's why you're here, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course."

"It's your wife. You're very unhappy about your wife. She's a psychosomatic."

"Miss Wolheim told you that."

"Miss Wolheim told me nothing. She made the appointment and that was all. There was no discussion other than her request that I grant you this special session, knowing of my overcrowded schedule. I may have to fly to Saudi Arabia at any moment, which should give you an idea of how busy I am."

"I'm sorry. If I've offended you, that is, not about Saudi Arabia."

"Your wife dwells on her hypochondria to a point where you no longer believe her when she is genuinely ill."

"I've never known her to be genuinely ill."

"That could be your male-chauvinist prejudice."

"I happen to consider myself quite free of such prejudice."

"Perhaps you don't recognize the symptoms. Let's get back to your wife. She's incredibly wealthy. I see you surrounded by wealth. A lavish apartment, a home in the country, a vast estate—"

"Very vast."

"Not important. You are surrounded by wealth but you have none of your own."

"But my health is good. I jog a lot."

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"Your wife's heart condition. It's serious."

Oliver almost leapt out of his seat with joy. "Really serious?"

"Much more serious than you suspect."

"But Irving hasn't said that. That's our doctor, Irving Labon."

"Perhaps because he's not too sure himself. He will soon suggest further tests, mark my word." She shut her eyes and made a tent with her fingers. Eyes still shut, she whispered, "I see a firm."

Oliver leaned forward eagerly, intrigued. "A firm? What kind of firm?"

"I see newsprint. I see book jackets and publicity blurbs and bad notices in *Publishers Weekly*." Her eyes flew open. "Are you a writer?"

"Yes—yes, I am. I write short stories. Someday I'm going to write a novel. As soon as I sell a short story."

"I see you in a publishing house." Oliver swallowed. "Your own publishing house."

"My own publishing house?"

"Your own publishing house."

"But where will I get the money?"

Flora Daguerre leaned back seductively and smiled enigmatically. "You'll get the money."

Marion sat in bed staring out the window at Central Park. The doctor had just taken her temperature and then shook the thermometer as though expecting it to evolve into one perfect dry vodka martini. "Aren't I any better?" asked Marion in a dismal voice.

"I wish you'd get out of bed, Marion."

"But I'm so weak."

It had been raining all morning and Nurse Wolheim had just cheerfully announced the radio predicted a full-blown hurricane by nightfall as she went to the kitchen to heat up some milk for her patient.

The doctor looked at Marion gravely. "I want you to attempt to get up and make an appearance at Oliver's dinner party tonight."

"Where did he meet this Flora Daguerre?"

"I think Nurse Wolheim told him about her a couple of weeks ago. There's an article on her in this week's *New York* magazine. She's quite a remarkable woman."

"I skimmed it." She found a brave smile for Irving. "Perhaps she can tell me a few things about me. If I'll ever get well again."

"Of course you'll be well again!"

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"Nothing ever seems to work. All the medicines you've been feeding me—they don't seem to do my heart much good."

"*You* don't do your heart much good, Marion. You're not cooperating!"

"I'm doing my best, Irving. I really am. Oh, Irving, you've been so kind and understanding and professional and I'm such an ungrateful burden. I should endow you with a private institution all your own. I know that's your dream and dreams should come true." Irving's look was painfully noncommittal. "Flora Daguerre is very pretty."

"Yes, the photographs are quite becoming."

"I'll pale beside her."

"Nonsense. You have a beauty all your own." Irving leaned over and patted her hand. "Marion, you're an original."

Oliver had carefully planned the dinner menu with an elegant and impertinent chef especially hired for the occasion. Their usual cook was given the night off with two orchestra seats for a hit musical. The butler and maids were carefully instructed and the stage was set for Flora Daguerre's entrance. She had assured Oliver by phone, earlier, that despite the hurricane that had struck the city she would be there. Her voice had caressed his ear and he could feel her hot tongue beating a sensual tattoo on his lobe.

With Nurse Wolheim's assistance, Marion got out of bed and into a stark black Givenchy, which succeeded in giving her the appearance of a defrocked vampire. With the aid of a recently acquired malacca cane topped by a platinum wolf's head with ruby eyes and an emerald mouth, she made her way slowly into the vast sitting room where Flora Daguerre sat sipping sherry. The doctor was there without his wife, Betsy, who had used the hurricane as an excuse to stay home with her neurotic children, who hid under beds or in dark closets especially during hurricanes.

Nurse Wolheim, asked to join the party as a substitute for Irving's absent wife, hurried forward to assist Marion to a chair. Flora Daguerre was staring at Marion intently and Marion caught the look. They had been introduced while Marion was being assisted into the chair and Marion had not been too infirm to size up the psychic as one formidable gorgeous hunk of woman. Marion had given her cane to the nurse, who placed it on the floor next to the chair. Marion was nervously twisting a black handkerchief trimmed in Chantilly lace. There was a clap of thunder, a flash of lightning, and the rain

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beat mercilessly against the windows, sounding like an army of evil, satanic imps demanding entrance into the apartment.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" Marion asked the psychic.

"Darling," interjected Oliver, "would you like a drop of sherry?"

"I'd like a glass," said Marion, returning her attention to Flora. "What do you see? You see something? I know you do. I read the article. What do you see?"

"Oh, it's nothing. Nothing at all." The psychic leaned back, smiled, and then suddenly leaned forward again as though jerked there by an irresistible, unseen hand.

Oliver had given Marion her glass of sherry and she had trouble steadying it in her trembling hand. "Make her tell me what she sees! Make her tell me!" Her voice was rising hysterically and Irving hurried to her side, making soothing noises.

"My God, Flora," cried Oliver, "what is it?"

"I can't! I can't!" Flora was on her feet. There was a flash of lightning, a clap of thunder, and a window flew open with a crash, sending shattered glass flying in all directions. Marion screamed and dropped her glass. She got to her feet and made a move toward Flora when she let out an agonizing cry, clutched at her heart, and collapsed to the floor at Oliver's feet.

The doctor knelt at her side and felt her pulse. "Quickly!" he shouted to Nurse Wolheim, "help me move her to the bedroom!" To Oliver he said, "She's failing fast. She's going."

Nurse Wolheim had her fingers on Marion's pulse. "Gone."

The restaurant in Greenwich Village was charming and just the sort of place Oliver preferred to frequent. He sat in a booth with Flora Daguerre, Doctor Irving Labon, and Nurse Wolheim while the Italian waiter poured the champagne. After the waiter left, Oliver raised his glass in a toast. "To Marion, God bless her—wherever she is." The others chorused "To Marion," and drank deeply.

"How soon will her will be probated?" the doctor asked Oliver.

"Don't ask me to rush it along. We mustn't arouse any suspicions. You know what lawyers are like, especially Marion's."

"My own hospital," said Irving with a faraway look in his eyes.

"My own psychic center," said Flora with a wink for Oliver.

"My very own," said Nurse Wolheim, taking the doctor's hand.

"My own publishing house," said Oliver as he signaled the hovering waiter to pour more champagne. He stared at Nurse Wolheim's hand clutching the doctor's. "Tell me, Irving, how's Betsy's heart?"

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"Not too good lately," said the doctor with a sad sigh, "not too good at all. But she's hanging on bravely."

Flora was staring at the doctor. "Oh, dear."

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, nothing—nothing, really. I—well, let's just enjoy our celebration." But she was smiling knowingly at the doctor and the doctor felt like jumping with joy.

"I've started my novel today," announced Oliver and he basked happily in the chorus of congratulations. "It has a supernatural theme. It was inspired by the way that window suddenly crashed open the night Marion had her fatal heart attack. I mean, it's amazing—it couldn't have worked better to scare her to death if we'd planned it in advance."

"It *was* advantageous, wasn't it?" said Flora. "In Marion's deteriorated condition, any sudden shock would have made her heart fail. Isn't that so, Doctor?"

The doctor smiled as he raised the champagne glass to his lips. "You should know. You're the psychic."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

THE FINAL STRETCH

by MARK GRENIER

A condemned malefactor named Ware
On the gallows was heard to declare
While regarding the rope:
"Oh, I very much hope
This will not be a drawn-out affair."

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a *NEW* short story by

CARLETON CARPENTER

Carleton Carpenter, whose talent you know from M-G-M musicals, is the author of six mystery novels, with a seventh, The Peabody Experience, *due for publication soon. His musical,* Northern Boulevard *(book by Kevin Brofsky, music and lyrics by Mr. Carpenter), opened at the Amas Theater in New York earlier this year.*

Sonny heard the words from somewhere beyond his locked door. Was it Her this time? Was it Him? Was it both of Them . . .?

PLEASURE FOR PLEASURE

by CARLETON CARPENTER

"Come on, Sonny. Come on out now."

The voice was muffled—hardly heard through the closed door—and unheeded. Those same words, echoing over and over, floating around the room—his room—rising and falling with ever-changing inflections. Little clouds of words, drifting over and around him. Tiny puffs of words, wispy and meaningless from incessant repetition. Words from a void somewhere beyond his locked door. Was it Her this time? Was it Him? Was it both of Them?

He smiled. Things could stay hot for hours. Or cold. Whatever he wanted. However he chose to play it. This was his territory. His room. His retreat. His stage. His security. Even They couldn't violate that. They never had and he knew They never would.

How strange, he thought as his eyes dodged the feathery clumps of words circling about the room and focused on the familiar ceiling. At first it was punishment. His room. Sent to his room. Ordered to his room as punishment for some forgotten infraction of some un-

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liveable-with law. But he had fooled Them by making a wonderful fast friend of his room.

In the beginning, of course, his tears and sobs had been real. The beatings had hurt. The whippings. The "lessons." Oh, he was a remarkable student. He learned the lessons—taught often and forcefully. The spankings weren't as bad as the slaps. Or "cuffs," as they were called. Or having his "ears boxed." He'd imagined Them cutting off his ears, crating them up, and having them carted off somewhere, to Grandma's maybe—and leaving him with two useless holes in his head.

The razor strop was worse than the slaps. It seemed so impersonal and left wide bands of burning red on the back of his thighs. But the very worst were the switches He ripped from the sugar maple in the front yard. They stung like the very devil and raised welts that sometimes took weeks to go away. That's how he'd gotten his first long pants. They would cover the marks on his calves and nobody at school would know.

After a time, almost suddenly, the beatings didn't hurt any more. Even the maple switches. That's when he started to fake the sobbings. Hearing audible agony from the inflicted pain was important to Them—the proof of the lesson well taught and well remembered. So he'd close his door and fake-sob loudly, knowing it would please them. Pleasure for pain. It was the arrangement he'd learned to live with.

And it gave him the chance to be left alone in his retreat. Alone with his dear friend, his room. They had things to talk over and share. Secret things. Secret longings. Merry-go-rounds of bobbing wishes to ride upon. Around and around and a gold ring every go-round. Not brass—gold.

The brass came later. A shiny two-piece set from the hardware store downtown. Six brass screws, too, and that wonderful sliding bolt. Of course he was older now, and bigger. Big enough to hit back. But he never did. That wasn't his nature. A nature almost totally passive—carefully nurtured and nourished from tot to teen into subjugated acquiescence. He accepted. He retreated. He waited. It became just one more ritual: accept, retreat, wait.

He accepted, passively, the time when the physical beatings were replaced with verbal assaults—tongue lashings instead of strop lashings. This change evolved partly because of his physical growth —somewhat crippled but still fairly robust—and His physical decline brought on by ever-increasing amounts of alcohol intake. *She*

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had long since stopped being much of a threat. Beer, bloat, and boredom hadn't completely done Her in, but kept Her pretty much in the background when battle time rolled around. She got in Her licks every once in a drunken while, but they were only weak reinforcements for Him, and did little but reaffirm Their alliance.

"Come on, Sonny. Come on out now."

It was almost a plea to come play. When Their drinking began in earnest, They needed Their toy, and he, as always, was the plaything, the big rubber clown that kept bounding back upright on its feet no matter how often and forcefully They tried to knock it over.

He would listen to Them cooing and calling through his door, then he'd ask his room if he should go out and join Them. His room-friend always eventually gave him the go-ahead. Then he'd slide the brass bolt and enter the fray once more. He would see the anticipated pleasure deepening the booze-blush on Their anxious faces and it would begin anew. He almost looked forward to these sessions now because he was the one in control. He called the shots. They couldn't play without him. He could make Them wait and wait until his room-friend consented. Pleasure for pain had turned into pleasure for pleasure.

He smiled to himself. It would kill Them to know he had learned to take enjoyment. He never let on. He'd enter the living room, stand and take the abuse and wild accusations of things he could never have thought of doing. In a way, he admired Him and His whiskey-fertile imagination. When the chemical imbalance was just right, He could be incredibly inventive with charges of unspeakably nasty and vile acts that Sonny was supposed to have committed. Like a continuing soap opera of horror, he'd learn of the ever more appalling acts of degeneracy attributed to Sonny. Was he Sonny? Was Sonny someone else? Whatever. He accepted—accepted, retreated, and waited.

"Come on, Sonny. Come on out now."

He moved slightly and straightened his shoulders against the wall. How long had he sat here on the floor? He rubbed his back, doglike, against the rose-covered wallpaper. Rose wallpaper? His room-friend was pale-blue.

He closed his tired eyes and opened them wide, blinking. This wasn't his room—his security, his sanctuary. This was the living room. The battlefield. Ah, but now it, too, was suddenly his security, his stage, his retreat.

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The wispy clouds of faroff voices still floated around him in the room, but they had taken on a new dimension. They tinkled, like breaking glass. They seemed so desperate and pleading, almost caring. It made him sad. He could feel tears welling up in his eyes. How long had it been since he'd *really* cried? He could tell he was crying for real now. In a way it was a wonderful relief.

The room was growing heavy, with great billows all around him. Sobs—*real sobs*—choked him as tears streamed down the scar on his cheek. He straightened his knees, pushing himself off the floor, his back sliding up the roses until he was standing. He was coughing and crying now as he started toward the door, limping slightly as he had for years.

Almost falling when he tripped on something on the floor, he wiped at his eyes and looked down. What was that—one of the heavy work shoes He always wore?

Had They come back? Bored at Grandma's, had They returned to the old place for one last terrible game? They must have. Hadn't They been calling him again? Wasn't that why he'd come out into the living room?

Now he remembered. He'd heard Them calling, but when he'd finally come out of the room They weren't there. He'd seen Them through the partially open door passed out on Their beds in a drunken stupor.

They were still in there, They had to be, but the voices continued to call to him from outside.

He stumbled toward the front door, unlocked it, and opened it a few inches. Fresh air rushed in, feeling good and cool against his stinging eyes. A man with a bullhorn was hurrying up the porch stairs. He withdrew the rifle barrel from the small window beside the door where it had been propped in position and tossed it on the porch. "A BB-gun? Sonny, what the hell you been doin', boy, givin' us such a bad time? Makin' us use that gas and all? You oughtta be ashamed of yourself! We figured you had some big ole cannon or somethin' in there, holdin' down the fort. You knowed for months this ole place was comin' down! Now you knowed that, didn't you, Sonny?"

Sonny blew his nose. "Yes, sir."

"Well, damn! They got the wrecker's ball all set up and everythin'! You been one hell of a fly in the ointment!"

"Yes, sir."

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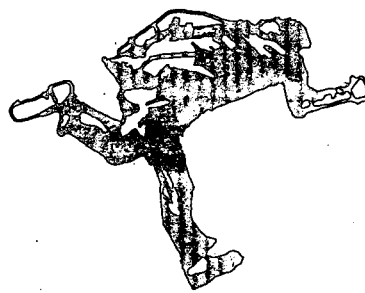
"Your Grandma told us yesterday your folks was stayin' over there to her place. Why ain't you?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you come on now and get over there," the man said, leading him firmly down the sagging porch steps.

Sonny didn't look back at the house and tried not to think of his room-friend as the man called through the bullhorn to a shadowy figure up on top of a tall crane. "Let 'er rip!"

The wrecking ball from the giant erector-set swung heavily toward the house.



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BRENT'S EXPERIMENT

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Maxine Shepperton woke up and heard the silence and it terrified her. She was sweating in her dress on this dry, cool afternoon. She got up and went to the open window, leaned through, and located Ransom who was on his knees at the end of the garden.

"Ranse!"

He turned with a trowel in his hand, a flat of marigolds on the grass beside him, several of the plants established in freshly turned earth.

"Nap all done?" he called.

"Where's Sybil?"

"She went down by the lake. Took her sketchpad."

"Find her. Bring her back."

Ransom Shepperton felt stubborn anger. Then he decided he didn't want this evening spoiled by a quarrel with his neurotic wife. He stood up from his planting to demonstrate that her demand was going to be met. But he had to say, "Sybil is okay, dear. She is always okay."

"I want her where I can see her," Maxine said. Then, as her husband moved out of the garden and toward the pine copse on the shore of Lake Massawippi, she went and washed her face before going downstairs to make herself a strong gin and tonic . . .

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Carl Dawson accepted the ten-dollar bills—there were nine of them—folded them and tucked them into the pocket of his shirt. He looked up at the front of the house, admiring its fresh coat of paint. The owner and his wife, standing on the pavement beside him, were even more satisfied than Carl was—at this distance they couldn't see the scrappy places.

"We'll tell our friends if they want any painting done," the lady said.

"Thanks." Carl slammed the trunk of his car on drop-sheet, buckets, and brushes. "But not too soon. I don't like working every day."

They were grinning as he drove away, but he had told them the truth. Once upon a time, Dawson had operated a milk route for Elmhurst Dairy in the Verdun district of Montreal. But if ever there was a tedious job, it consisted of showing up day in, day out, leaving pints of milk on doorsteps. He was not a religious man, but if Purgatory did exist Dawson imagined it would involve an endless milk route in the sky.

He escaped this slavery simply by going to sleep drunk on more than one occasion and failing to wake up on time. There weren't many jobs available in Montreal for a non-French-speaking individual with an alcohol problem, not to mention a secret addiction to gambling. So Dawson drifted into house-painting, the sort of work that was undemandingly random and paid cash in hand. The regular money came in through Jenny's working at the café.

Clarissa was sitting on the front step of the apartment building when Dawson drove up an hour and a half later with forty dollars in his shirt pocket. Encountering his bookie at the tavern had been bad luck. Still, it was good to be paid up. Clarissa ran to him and waited to be picked up after he got out and slammed the dented door. She was a rangy girl for six years old, skinny legs and shoulders sticking out as her father hefted her around the waist. "What have you been up to all day?" he asked her.

"I made you a drawing."

"That's nice. I painted you a house." He took a crumple of paper money from his shirt pocket. "Look what they paid me."

"All that money!" She rolled her eyes and laughed.

He extricated a one-dollar bill from the wad. "If I like your drawing, I'll buy it."

They viewed it on the kitchen table. It was a sketch of a broad lake, mature work for one so young. The water was flat calm, re-

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flecting a copse of pine trees on the far shore. In the foreground, a woodpecker on a branch accented the composition with a flash of red.

"That's terrific. Where did you see this place?"

"I didn't. I just thought of it."

"Well, this is my picture now." He gave her the dollar and kissed the top of her head where the chestnut hair had been separated in a sharp part and brushed smooth by her mother. "Nobody will ever own this picture except me."

The first thing Jenny Dawson did when she came in was change out of her uniform and into a pair of jeans and one of her husband's shirts with the tail knotted round her narrow waist like a sash. Then she and Clarissa began setting the table. Dawson watched them from the stove where he was stirring the pot of wieners and beans. "You two look like sisters, not mother and daughter," he said. They had heard this before and they liked it.

"Waiting on tables all day keeps me youthful," Jenny said.

"Waiting all day for my parents to come home makes me old," Clarissa said and they all laughed. She had a way with words. Even when she was just learning to speak, it came through. Her description of Doctor Brent, delivered from her highchair when she was three years old, had become enshrined in Dawson family lore. "Dr. Brent," she had described him. "One big shoulder, another big shoulder." Her voice deepened. "And how are you, Mrs. Dawson?"

They ate in sober silence, using chunks of brown bread to swab the sauce from their plates. Refilling her glass and her daughter's with apple juice from a carton, Jenny said, "Did you finish the house today?"

"All done."

"They pay you?"

He fished the cash from his pocket and dropped it by her plate. "Thirty-nine bucks. I bought Clarissa's latest work for a dollar."

Jenny spread the bills between thumb and finger before sliding them into her pocket. "Not much money for all that work."

"Cheap bastard had me leave the front porch and the back verandah—said he could do those himself from a stepladder."

After supper they watched a *Star Trek* rerun, after which Clarissa was allowed out to see her friends for half an hour before bedtime. Dawson stood by the front window looking down three floors to the street, watching his daughter leave the building and head for the

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candy store at the corner of Fortune Street, then began scratching his head, his neck, his armpits, his chest.

"Let me know if you find anything," Jenny said.

"Think I'll wander over to the tavern," he said. "Just one pint."

"Not tonight," she said.

He was his own man and they both knew it. "Why not?"

"Did you forget Dr. Brent?"

"Is this Thursday?"

"All day." She liked her husband to enjoy himself within limits. He had been controlling his drinking lately, and the gambling as far as she knew. "If he's on time and he doesn't stay long, we can get Mrs. Coleman to come in and sit with Clarissa and I'll join you."

Dr. Brent arrived at seven, a portly man breathing heavily in the doorway after the three-flight trudge. He sat in his accustomed chair testing the tape-recorder while Jenny made coffee. Dawson stood with his hands in his pockets, trying desperately to think of something to say. After all these years he was still shy in the presence of the eminent psychologist.

"I'm sorry Clarissa isn't here," Jenny said as she set one of her good cups with matching saucer on a table beside the doctor. "We told her half an hour."

"Not to worry." Brent switched on. "Dawson residence, May twenty-nine," he said into the machine. "How have things been going this past month?"

"She's doing well at school," Jenny said. "Not so good in arithmetic, but in English composition she got an A."

"She drew a picture for me today," Dawson said. He found it and showed it to the doctor.

"This is very interesting. Did she copy it from something?"

"No, she told me she just thought of it."

The footsteps on the stairs began suddenly and approached at a stampede, children falling over each other, voices piping from a floor away, desperately eager to be first with the terrible news. "Mrs. Dawson! Mr. Dawson! Clarissa's been hit with a car!"

Dr. Brent adjusted the positions of the two armchairs, then went behind his desk and sat down. He pressed a button on the intercom. "Ask Mr. and Mrs. Dawson to come in now, please."

While he waited, he felt—not for the first time—a longing for the old days when he had been a general practitioner. Making house calls had given him great satisfaction. There was a feeling in a sick-

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room as if it were a stage and he, when he walked in with his satchel, was the star whose entrance dispelled all anxiety. Not every wound was healed, but there was always a positive response to his visit. Now, having spent the years and the money to become a specialist in child psychology, he dealt mostly with abstract problems of long duration. Brent received little in the way of thanks these days—his patients were never sure whether they were cured.

The door opened and two people walked into the office. He recognized Carl Dawson, but who was this little elderly woman? She was dressed in a skirt and blouse too large for her, hollow cheeks and deep-set eyes framed by a fall of lifeless hair. She was Jenny Dawson, four months after the death of her daughter.

"Do sit down. Can I get you something? Coffee?"

"Not for me, thanks," Dawson said. He leaned forward and peered into Jenny's face. "Coffee for you, love?" he enunciated as to a deaf person.

She looked up and past her husband. Here was what had been on her mind for weeks, what she had finally persuaded Carl to bring her here to say. "I want her back, Dr. Brent. You know where she's living. I have to have Angelica back."

"You know that isn't possible. The child is six years old. Her name isn't even Angelica. They gave her another name. These people are her mother and father now—they love her, there can be no going back."

"I gave birth to identical twins. You came to us and gave us money—gave *him* money." Jenny turned murderous eyes on her husband. "He persuaded me. I must have been mad."

"No." Dawson protested, "it was a good idea. I wasn't working—we didn't even have a place to live. Dr. Brent fixed us up. We were able to do better for Clarissa."

"Clarissa is dead. Angelica is alive. She must look just like Clarissa. I want her back." The wasted woman was not as weak as she appeared to be. She stared across the desk at Brent, penetrating his professional calm with her feverish energy. "I am going to have her back."

Dawson's panic made him smile. "We signed a paper. It was a legal agreement. We took the money. And Dr. Brent has been doing his interviews all these years, running his experiment."

"To hell with the experiment. I bore two daughters. One has been killed. I want the other."

"The experiment is finished," Brent said. "It no longer has any-

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thing to do with my refusal to divulge the whereabouts of the girl." He couldn't have admitted it to the bereaved parents, but he felt more misery over the cancellation of his project than he did over their loss. Brent's experiment had been going well—identical twins, separated at birth, one left with the original parents to be raised in semi-deprived conditions, the other transplanted to a privileged environment. How would they turn out? Would Child A, with expensive education, toys, food, books, travel, surpass her sister, Child B, who was denied these advantages? Which was more important, nature or nurture? Brent had read the myths about twins raised apart who, as adults, displayed similarities. The coincidences seemed superficial, such as smoking the same brand of cigarettes or going in for ballroom dancing. What was needed were detailed case histories observed over a period of years. Until the accident, he had been writing them.

"Believe me," he said to Mrs. Dawson, "my main interest now is to make sure your surviving daughter continues to lead a happy life."

For what must have been a full minute, there was silence in the doctor's office. Then Jenny Dawson said, "Are you going to bring Angelica back to me?"

"I can't do that. It would be wrong."

"Then I'm going to kill you." She said it with conviction. "Not now. Sometime soon when you don't expect it. Carl will help me if he knows what's good for him. Then we'll get access to your files and find out where Angelica lives. And we'll bring her home."

When the distraught parents had gone away, Dr. Brent was left to consider the problem. There was no easy answer. He could try to have Jenny Dawson committed to an institution. But once she began talking to psychiatrists, there was no telling what the ramifications might be. His experiment—intended to be kept secret until publication when the girls became sixteen—was open to various interpretations. Not every member of the medical profession would be on his side.

As for police protection—he would have to say why this woman was threatening him. Most officers would probably sympathize with her. No, all he could do would be to stay alert, stay alive.

Leaving the building after working late, stepping outside onto a darkening street, Dr. Brent was startled when a man emerged from

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a doorway and fell into step beside him. It was Carl Dawson, and he smelled of whiskey. "Where is your wife?"

"At home, watching television. That's what she does these days. Me, I go out for a drink."

"Don't let me stop you."

"Come with me. Something we ought to talk about."

"It's been a long, hard day—"

"It gets better. One drink and listen to what I have to say."

"One drink, then." As they headed for the nearest bar, Brent said, "You know Jenny better than I do. Should I be taking her threat seriously?"

"Yes. She means to kill you. And she can do it. What do you call it, an obsession? She never thinks or talks about anything else than getting our other girl back." Dawson pulled open a glass door on an atmosphere of beer fumes, smoke, and loud conversation. "But my idea changes all that."

Brent was put off at first by Dawson's plan. Then he began to ask himself what was wrong with it. "Let me play back what you've told me," he said. His drink was finished and he made a gesture at the bartender. "You want me to arrange for your daughter's return to you and Jenny. This calms her for a start and removes the threat against my life. But more than that, I can extend my experiment. As things stand, it's over. I can't compare the development of identical twins when only one child exists." He paid for the fresh drinks, took a greedy swallow. "But I *can* compare the progress of the one child in a certain environment against her continuing development when that life-style is changed completely."

"Right. She'll be leaving her foster parents and coming back to her natural parents. There should be lots of interesting reactions."

The doctor gave him a searching look. "Are you sure this is your idea?"

"Jenny's? Forget it. I told you, she watches the box and thinks about knocking you off if you don't deliver Angelica."

"Sybil," Brent said.

"Is that her new name?"

"Yes."

"Then you intend to go along?"

Brent let his mind play over the problem. "It won't be easy. We can't just go to the foster parents and ask them to give her up."

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Dawson finished his second drink. "I'll need some money for helping you with this."

"Of course you will. I'll give you money."

The lake was flat calm and grey as the overcast sky. A copse of pine trees was reflected in the water, spiky black. Dawson stared down from the high road as Dr. Brent concentrated on driving his car along dirt ruts. "It's like the drawing Clarissa did."

"I have it in my notes," Brent confirmed.

They left the view of the lake and turned onto a paved secondary road, moving farther up sloping ground toward a cluster of roofs a few miles distant. Colored shingles, an area of slate, a steeple with a cross—typical Quebec village. "You're sure she'll get in the car?" Dawson asked.

"Why should she refuse? She's been talking to me once a month for as long as she can remember."

"I'm getting scared," the house-painter said after a silence. "Kidnaping."

"There'll be no problem. I'll be around to calm the girl."

"I never thought you'd go along."

"Six years' work. I intend to publish as planned."

"Won't that expose you? They're bound to find out you took her."

"That bridge is a long way down the road."

The car slowed to a stop beside an open field. There were swings and slides half a mile away and a population of children. "I see her," Brent said. "She must come out this gate to go home."

Dawson produced a bottle of whiskey, uncapped it, and took a swallow. He offered it to Brent, who shook his head. "We're a couple of bastards—right, Doc?"

"Keep your voice down."

"You're worse than I am. I'm the child's true father. I'm trying to save her mother's sanity."

"Liar. You're doing it for the money I'm paying you."

"I need it. It isn't fair, I've never been able to earn big money like you do." Dawson drank again. "But what's your excuse? A lot of words on sheets of paper. Cold, calculating bastard."

"It never changes. Knox needed bodies for dissection so he could train young doctors in anatomy. He bought corpses resurrected from cemeteries. The mob drove him out. They hate to be enlightened."

"She's coming," Dawson said. "God, it could be Clarissa."

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Brent opened the door and got out of the car. "Sybil! Over here, dear."

"Dr. Brent!" She ran to him and put up her cheek for an avuncular kiss.

"I want you to meet somebody. That's it, get in beside me. Say hello to Mr. Dawson." He switched on and the car began to move. "How would you like to go for a drive to Montreal?"

"I'd love it. Do Mummy and Daddy know?"

"Not yet, but they will. Do you trust me, Sybil?"

The girl looked at her friend the doctor out of the corner of her eye. Dawson saw the familiar expression and his stomach flipped over. "If we can't trust our family doctor," the six-year-old said in a mock-adult voice, "whom can we trust?" She said the "whom" in italics.

Maxine Shepperton stood at the upstairs study window staring at the distant lake. Before Sybil vanished, she had never exceeded one drink before dinner. Now she was so drunk as to be anaesthetized. Behind her, pages turned as her husband scanned a newspaper spread open on his desk. In the years before Ransom Shepperton owned a chain of restaurants, he had operated a luncheonette by himself. Maxine had been hired to do some of the cooking. Quiet times in the afternoon, she had watched him read a paper laid open on the counter in just this way, pages unfolding monotonously as if every item of news was of equal value and none worth much attention.

Those were the good times, she realized now, before she and Ranse were married.

A figure moved across the gravel driveway, passing from behind the mock orange to the cover of the big cedar. "He's there again."

"Did you see him?" Her husband came to stand behind her. "I don't see anything."

"Call the police."

"Last time they found nobody." He left the room, saying, "If he's down there, I'm going to get hold of him."

Shepperton left by the back door, circled wide along a ledge of lower ground, came up on the front driveway, and approached silently beside the gravel path, walking on freshly cut grass. The man was leaning on the cedar trunk, doing nothing more threatening than drinking from a bottle. It was getting dark on this September

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evening. The restaurant owner got close enough almost to touch him.

"Looking for somebody?"

Carl Dawson showed no fear. He appeared relieved to be apprehended, not to be a skulker any longer. "Mr. Shepperton?"

"Yes."

"I want to tell you about your daughter. But you musn't hassle me."

Shepperton was taking deep breaths. "I won't do a thing. Talk to me."

"I need some money."

"What kind of money?"

"Not a lot. Five thousand dollars."

"I can do that. If she's all right."

"She's fine. You may not believe any of this. Can we go inside?" Dawson put the empty bottle in his pocket. "I could use a drink."

Seated in the grand room upstairs with a glass of whiskey in his hand, avoiding Maxine Shepperton's eyes, Dawson deliverd the story he had prepared—some of it true, parts of it lies. They knew, of course, about Dr. Brent and his study of identical twins raised in opposing conditions. That was how they had come to adopt Angelica in the first place and to rename her Sybil. When he told them of Clarissa's accidental death, they were distressed.

"That's terrible," Maxine said. "You poor people. Ranse, I'll have a drink now with Mr. Dawson."

"Apart from shattering me and Jenny completely," Dawson went on, "it ruined Dr. Brent's experiment. He could no longer compare the development of the two girls."

"Yes, of course."

"So he came to me with this idea. We'd grab Angelica—Sybil—and take her to our place. You had no idea of our identity and you weren't likely to find out. We're miles away, in Verdun."

"Sounds flimsy to me," Shepperton said. "Risky."

"Brent was desperate. He'd put in six years' work. The only way he could go on was to switch your girl to the other environment and start studying the effects of the changes."

"Barbaric. What kind of a psychopath is Brent?"

"What I don't understand," Maxine said, "is why you've come to us now."

"Because she isn't happy. It isn't working. Maybe Brent is satis-

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fied, he's doing his tape recordings of talks with Sybil. Yes, we've kept the name. Anything that happens is okay with the doctor—it's all something new for him to observe. But even Jenny, my wife, the girl's natural mother, even she can see it was a mistake. Sybil belongs here."

"Thank God. Thank God."

Shepperton got to his feet. "I'll get out the car. We can be there in an hour."

Dawson rolled the empty glass between the palms of his hands. "I'm a self-employed decorator, sir. Things have not been good for me lately. Illness kept me off the ladder. The recession—people are putting off having their houses painted—"

"Five thousand, you said?"

Maxine looked shocked. "Ranse."

Her husband raised a hand. "No problem. You should have told Brent no deal when he came up with this crazy plan. But I can understand how you and your wife must have felt, losing your child. Now you've shown courage coming here and leveling with us. I'll talk to the bank tomorrow and arrange the money." As he looked for his car keys, he said, "It's Brent. We'll have to decide what to do about Brent."

Dawson saw to it that Sybil was equipped with her sketchpad and pencils. The girl was puzzled, being taken out at this time of the evening when she had been ready for bed. "It's important," her new father told his wife. "She did that terrific drawing of the railway overpass in daylight. Now the tunnel is jammed with cars, all with their lights on. It'll never be the same, she has to draw it again. Come on, Sybil."

Jenny shook her head and went back to assembling plastic toys. Sybil needed new clothes and tips were not that great these days at the café. To supplement the family income, she was doing piecework. Carl would have to get a painting contract soon but there was no use nagging him.

Outside, Dawson led Sybil by the hand, hurrying to Fortune Street and turning right. "The overpass is the other way," Sybil said.

"I know. You'll see why in a minute."

She recognized the station-wagon first. Then she saw the people getting out of it. The child's face had been set in a worried frown for weeks. Now her eyes widened and she began to wail. She ran to them, tears flowing. "Mummy! Daddy!"

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"It's all right now, darling. You're safe, we're going home."

Shepperton took Dawson's hand, held him at arm's length, studying his face. "You're the genuine article, mister. You delivered. I wasn't sure until now."

"It was awful," the girl wept. "Such a little house and I don't have any of my things and I thought I'd never see you again—and it's so noisy when I try to sleep at night, they were always yelling at each other and I wanted to yell, too, but I was afraid—"

"Yes, you were afraid. Of course you were afraid." Maxine cradled her child. "But it's over, we're going home."

Dawson saw them into the car and away down the street. Then he went into the tavern and spent his last two dollars on beer which he drank more quickly than he intended. Then there was nothing for it but to go home.

In the apartment, Jenny was still assembling toys with her eyes on the television news. "How did it go?"

"Fine."

She became aware that he was alone. She turned to stare. Her heart stopped for a second, then beat faster. Looking away from him, she said abruptly, "Where is my daughter?"

"Let me tell you about that," Dawson said.

Doctor Brent's answering service rang through, and he picked up the telephone at his desk where he was transcribing notes. "There's a woman on the line, Doctor. I'm sorry to trouble you but she insists on getting through. She sounds desperate—Mrs. Dawson."

"Yes, all right. I'll take the call."

When she came on, her voice was so faint he missed what she said. "I'm sorry, I didn't hear that."

"I said you'd better get over here. He's given her back."

"What?"

"Carl got in touch with those other people. He took Sybil out on some crazy excuse and gave her back to them. She's gone. I'll never get her again."

"Why would he do that?"

"Why else? You gave him money and he spent it drinking and gambling. He's always looking for sources of money without working. These people were the obvious choice."

"This makes things very difficult."

"You have no idea, Dr. Brent. You better get over here."

"I don't see what I can do tonight."

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"Just get here. You'll see."

He drove down from Westmount, across the river, and into the depressing suburb of Verdun. These surroundings, he thought, must have an effect on the people who live here, the monotony of drab houses, the crowding. Such a good experiment, unique, going so well. Now it was finished.

Brent parked across the street and went into the Dawsons' building through the familiar doorway with the lock that had been broken for a year. Vandalized mailboxes gaped open on the wall. The stairway smelled of cabbage and sweat.

Jenny Dawson let him in. He saw the aftermath of violence in her eyes and in the ransacked room.

"Did he do this?" Brent asked.

"Some of it. Trying to get away from me. I did the rest going after him." She pointed to the bedroom doorway. Dawson lay half in and half out of the room. His head was crushed on one side.

"What have I done?" the doctor said to himself.

"I'm the one," Jenny said. "But you better do something now. You have to help me get rid of him."

"I don't see how I can do that."

"You'd better think of a way. I'm not going to prison because of you and my husband messing me around."

Brent suggested coffee to give her something to do. He drank a cup at the kitchen table while she stood with her arms folded looking at a wall.

At last he said, "Never mind him, I'll get you out of here. Nobody saw me come in. We'll be careful going out. You'll spend the night at my place. I'll testify you arrived hours ago, at suppertime. You were distraught, still depressed over the death of Clarissa."

"That's true enough."

"I gave you a meal, then something to help you sleep. We telephoned here to tell Carl you'd be away the night. Spoke to him at seven o'clock. We know nothing of what happened after that. He was killed by an intruder or some drinking crony he brought back from the tavern. Person or persons unknown."

"Will it work?" She felt weary, ready to go along with anything.

Jenny closed the door silently and followed Dr. Brent down the stairs. They saw nobody as they left the building, crossed the street, and got into his car. He switched on and pulled away slowly. "All I wanted was my daughter back," she said.

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"God help us," Brent said, "we none of us meant it to end this way."

Having arrived moments ago in his station wagon, wheeling slowly in search of a parking space, Ransom Shepperton saw Brent and the woman leave the building and get into the doctor's car. He was relieved. Sight of them confirmed the address Dawson had supplied in his drunken condition earlier. Hopefully the man would be at home. Five hundred dollars—all the cash the restaurant owner had in the house—was only a down payment on the promised five thousand. But it would be a demonstration of intent and Shepperton felt that Carl Dawson could use a little good fortune at the moment.

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

A story with an unusual motivation for crime and an unexpected outcome by world correspondent Jeffry Scott, whose evocations of English village life are second to none . . .

THE WINNER OF THE FANCY DRESS

by JEFFRY SCOTT

England, the Reverend Simon Tilling brooded while mopping his balding head, was blessed by a temperate climate. Except when Market Tracy village held its annual church fete. Then patrons were sure to risk either sunstroke or pneumonia from incessant rain or arctic gales.

Mr. Tilling supposed, limply, that heat was preferable. But smashing down on the Tithe Field beside St. Mark's, it stewed tempers, induced headaches, and turned the raucous music from the tinny loudspeakers into searing skewers for the ears.

Abstractedly, the vicar realized that more than the weather oppressed him. It was, thankfully, a rare mood caused by emanations of wickedness. But that was ridiculous—Market Tracy's last experience of evil, while it remained mysterious, was a safe decade in the past.

Finger-combing his ragged grey tonsure, Mr. Tilling made a head count on his motley little flock: a brace of Red Indians with molting feathers, a deep-sea diver in some distress and rivers of perspiration, an Apache dancer and his moll, sundry astronauts and imposters and impersonators of all sorts.

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"I wanna stop hiding behind this silly hedge," a tiny Bikini Girl piped. "It's *silly*. I wanna let people see me!"

Before the vicar could answer, Marcia Disley cut in. "You're the silly one, Lucy Dudden. It'll spoil the effect if we trail along to the judging in dribs and drabs. Shut your face and do as you're told."

Not for the first time that afternoon, Mr. Tilling stared at young Marcia. She was very precocious for a girl awaiting her eleventh birthday, but there was more to it than that. Dressed as a service officer, she'd suddenly displayed some of the uniform's implicit adult authority.

He liked Marcia Disley, and not just because of her tragic background—an orphan of kinds, shunted between an aunt at Bristol and her grandmother here in the village. Growing up as a human parcel didn't seem to worry her. She was bright in every sense, well able to stand up for herself. Soon she would be as pretty as her wretched, wayward mother—but ten times more sensible.

So why was she bothering him?

Her costume jarred, that was it! Marcia wore the slate-blue of a Royal Air Force officer, beautifully cut and pressed, shoes shined, cap at a dashing angle. A burnt-cork moustache of the kind once affected by David Niven turned her into a completely convincing mannikin.

It was a false note, the vicar thought. The uniform was too good. Most children in the fancy-dress contest had raided their toy boxes or trusted that rubber boots, scarf-turned-sash, and wooden sword would allow them to pass as pirates. Marcia was in a different class. Yet Liz Disley, her grandmother, got by on the old-age pension and, whatever her virtues, was no needlewoman.

Drawing the little girl aside, Mr. Tilling tried to be amiably casual. "That's a fine rig-out, Marcia. Granny's work?"

Marcia Disley shook her head. "Mrs. Kerns gave it to me. Lady at the hotel."

"Yes, I know who she is," the vicar replied blankly, striving to fit an illegitimate urchin and the Squire's self-contained daughter into the same context.

Robot music stopped battering and was replaced by an equally inhuman voice, echoing itself around the parched grass, where the foliage of sentry oaks hung in dusty green clouds. "Fancy dress parade in five minutes, ladies and gentlemen! Let's give the kiddies plenty of support!"

Marshaled by Marcia Dinsley, Red Indians and the rest formed

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an impatient crocodile. "Forward—march!" Marcia yelled, making Mr. Tilling smile at the fervor of her role-playing. It was his last happy moment at the church fete.

She'd wed Roy Kerns nearly a decade before—he had married them at St Martin's—but the Reverend Simon Tilling always thought of her as Sophie Darton-Greene.

A tall woman, shrewdly competent, her voluptuous, cello figure and sloe eyes were faintly contradicted by a mannish chin. An Edwardian born out of her time, he'd always felt. But Squire Darton-Greene was long dead and Sophie didn't ride to hounds—she dashed about seeing wholesalers and menu-printers in her Mini.

Mr. Tilling deprecated rumors that she'd married beneath her in panic at being alone. Sophie and Roy Kerns made a good team—or had done once. Their small hotel, transformed from a rundown beer-house called the Market Tracy Arms, was doing well.

Roy Kerns settled in the area after being posted to the RAF base at Tracy Downs, the far side of the valley. He'd been a catering officer, not a pilot, but still registered as a dashing young man. On leaving the RAF, he had bought the decidedly modest transport café on the village outskirts, then courted and won Sophie Darton-Greene, selling the café and launching the hotel venture on their joint capital.

Gentry do not engage in trade. Yet Market Tracy still deferred to Sophie as the Squire's daughter and she tended to run most village events. The Fancy Dress contest, for instance, was her idea.

Watching the costumed youngsters mounting the plank-and-scaffolding platform, Mr. Tilling sighed heavily. There was a sense of things out of key, the faintest emotional whiff of malice somewhere. He was glumly frightened as well as baffled by his mood.

"Cheer up—I could have roped you in as a judge," Sophie Kerns teased. Her grass-brushing white-lace dress and Ascot hat failed to make her seem overdressed. "Roy is a pig. I'd set my heart on him judging this affair, but he's stuck up in London."

The vicar nodded woodenly. Secrets had a short life in Market Tracy. It appeared that Roy Kerns was in the process of deserting his wife. "Business trips" to London kept lengthening, and lately it was more a matter of him making brief visits to the village—in order to get further money to chase his tarts, the spiteful believed.

Eager to change the subject, Mr. Tilling admitted, "I thought fancy-dress contests were passé, my dear, but everyone really seems

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to be enjoying it." Fancy dress had been going out of favor when Simon Tilling had refused to attend a birthday party dressed as a fourteen-year-old toreador and Sophie Kerns' insistence on what he saw as a foredoomed disaster had irritated him.

"I'm a sucker for tradition," Sophie said easily. "We always had fancy dress at fetes when I was a girl. I yearned to enter, but Daddy wouldn't have it—it wasn't the done thing for *sahibs*." Her mouth went up at one corner and she quoted: "God bless the Squire and his relations—and keep us in our proper stations."

"And that," the vicar suggested, the ghost of a question in his voice, "is why you've taken pains over rigging out Marcia Disley."

"Good Lord, nothing gets past you." Sophie smiled again, less crookedly, to rob the remark of its initial sting. "Well, she's a good kid. I'd have loved one like Marcia, with her backbone."

Were he crass enough to peer beneath the hat's enormous brim, Mr. Tilling suspected, he would see tears in Sophie's eyes. She could be harsh and abrupt—not a kittenish bundle of femininity by any means—but her inability to bear babies had been a bitter blow.

Tucking her arm through his, Sophie drifted toward the stage. "As for taking pains, Marcia had no costume and wanted to enter. I'd been cleaning out closets and found one of Roy's old uniforms. The moth had been at it but there was enough left to make the smaller version. I couldn't see Marcia as a columbine or Little Bo Peep, that would be far too wet for her." Sophie's affection and admiration were transparent.

"A certain amount of fortitude may be called for from Marcia," Mr. Tilling told her. "Liz Disley isn't in the best of health. I get the impression that if she goes, that aunt in Bristol may be less willing to keep Marcia."

Sophie laughed softly. "I'm counting on it, Vicar. Marcia won't be an orphan of the storm. Ideally, I'd love her to be at a really good school by now. But even if Liz Disley lives to be a hundred, I'll make a place for Marcia in my business eventually."

"Dear me, your plans are well advanced." Mr. Tilling hadn't dreamed that Sophie was so interested in the child. A stroke of luck for poor Brenda Disley's illegitimate daughter, certainly. Perhaps Sophie was carried away by her lady-of-the-manor memories and felt responsibility for any unfortunate.

"Advanced and confidential," she warned. "Liz is terribly worried over 'taking charity,' as she terms it, but I'll talk her round in the end."

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They'd reached the base of the stage. A local TV newscaster recruited to open the fete was reviewing the Fancy Dress contestants. From his flustered manner with their entry cards, he was unhappy over alienating some of the proud parents in the front row who were daring him to ignore their children's manifest glory.

"Liz Disley," a fat woman screeched, "come over 'ere, m'dear! They're judging and you ain't seen your Marce yet!"

Sophie Kerns seemed to quiver. "Nor she has," she said under her breath. "Marcia changed at my place just now."

Liz Disley, with her large expressionless face and tubular body, had the air of a ship's figurehead given marginal life. Extricating herself from the standing bar, she plodded nearer the stage, fumbling for her glasses.

"Make way," Mr. Tilling begged good-naturedly. "Step in here, Mrs. Disley. There's Marcia, in the middle. There."

"Results in reverse order," the TV personality brayed, "Third prize, Sylvia Mainland—er, *Maitland*—as Florence Nightingale." Polite applause and mixed reactions from young Sylvia Maitland.

"Second is Dean Powyss, a spaceman—"

"Buck Rogers!" the red-headed boy corrected fiercely, winning cheers.

Blushing, the TV man dropped his cards, retrieved them, and moved over to a slate-blue shoulder. "And first place, very well deserved, goes to Marcia Disley as—" he checked her card "—The Spirit of 1940!"

"Well deserved," Sophie Kerns muttered, with bitterness the vicar couldn't understand and forgot the next second.

There was an abrupt disturbance nearby. Spectacles hanging off one ear, her eyes bulging, Liz Disley had a hand to her chest and was toppling forward. Pain flared in Mr. Tilling's knee—Korean-vintage shrapnel, he'd been an Army chaplain—as he jumped in to take her full weight.

Huge wet spots sprang across her faded cotton dress as Liz Disley crowed and pawed and labored for breath. It was raining—a sudden, savage thunderstorm.

"Help me carry her to the marquee!" Mr. Tilling barked. "Sophie, fetch Dr. Conrad—he'll be by the gate, taking tickets!"

Up on the stage, children were scurrying for cover. Marcia Disley was too frightened to move. The rain melted her charcoal moustache so that black tears dripped off her quivering chin.

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Instead of obeying him, Sophie Kerns gripped the vicar's arm hard enough to leave bruises the next day. "I didn't want this," she cried.

"Render unto Caesar, mind," Detective-inspector Chadbon reminded the Reverend Tilling. "You're a citizen as well as a man of the cloth. You can help me judge the background without betraying confidences."

Returning from Sunday lunch at Home Farm, his regular after-church appointment, Mr. Tilling had found the policeman placidly sitting on the vicarage doorstep. Chadbon, dapper in a green thorn-proof suit, shiny brogues, and a tweed hat, could have been a gentleman farmer. Only they rarely look quite so cynical.

"Come through to the study," Mr. Tilling invited, his heart sinking. Old Mrs. Disley had recovered from her attack, and high-ranking CID men do not bother with minor, non-criminal stirs at church fetes.

"I shan't play silly-beggars," Inspector Chadbon began. "Cards on the table. Mrs. Elizabeth Disley got a terrible scare at your little do yesterday. Enough to make her phone County HQ first thing this morning with an extraordinary allegation." He smacked his lips. Obviously he liked the allegation. "My first question is, how reliable is the old girl? Finds wicked men under the bed, persecuted by obscene callers from Mars, any of that class of thing?"

The vicar smiled reluctantly. As a professional listener and easer of confidences, he admired Chadbon's breezy approach. "No, Inspector, she's rather stolid. A dear good woman, but about as fanciful as a block of wood."

"Just my impression, sir. She might be mistaken, but she doesn't knowingly tell lies."

"What *has* she been saying?" Mr. Tilling was sheepish over curiosity that could not be denied.

"We'll get to that," Chadbon parried. Crossing his legs, he clasped a knee. "Ten years back, Mrs. Disley had a daughter living with her, Brenda Dianne Disley. Unmarried mother. She was a looker and—pardon me, Vicar—a bit of a sporting type, free with her favors. Therefore, when she refused to name her baby girl's father, there was no point in guessing."

"Get to the point," the vicar pleaded.

"Gladly, sir. When the baby—Marcia Disley, now aged ten—was still in the cradle, Brenda Disley vanished. She doted on the baby, but she never returned. Foul play was suspected. She went off in a

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thin frock and sandals, left all her clothes behind, all her souvenirs and such, and a bit of money.

"Brenda had always assured her mother that she knew who Marcia's father was, beyond doubt. She was shielding him for the moment, but very soon he'd come forward and marry her."

Mr. Tilling, his eyes closed in pain, nodded slowly. He said: "Brenda was promiscuous, easily led, a fool to herself, as they say, but not in the least vicious or decadent. She was a most caring mother, in her way. She would not have deserted the child."

Inspector Chadbon grimaced. "For my money—it wasn't my case, but a chap can speculate—the father didn't want to marry Brenda and put her out of the way. If we'd known the father's identity, then it might have been an open-and-shut thing."

The policeman knew something, Mr. Tilling guessed, and relished it. "Young Marcia spends every vacation here with her grandmother, Vicar. You see a fair bit of her. Does she remind you of anyone?"

"No." Mr. Tilling broke off and shook his head. Something about that uniform at the Fancy Dress had rung an alarm, but he still couldn't define what it signified.

Chadbon said, "Let's see if these change your mind." Joining the vicar behind the desk, he spread two pictures on the scarred-leather surface: a glossy new Polaroid and a yellowed monochrome snapshot.

"The Polaroid snap was taken yesterday. Come to that, dozens were taken—it took me all of half an hour to find what I wanted! Marcia in her RAF costume. The old photo was among Brenda Disley's effects after she vanished."

Mr. Tilling moistened his lips. The black-and-white image was a head-and-shoulders portrait of a young RAF officer, smile white beneath a pencil moustache.

Inspector Chadbon's very clean fingernail tapped the photographs in turn. "Father and daughter on the face of it, no pun intended. Definite likeness, or am I imagining that?"

"No," the vicar assented impatiently. "Who is this young man?"

"Why, that's Mr. Roy Kerns in the 1940s," Chadbon purred. "He shaved off the moustache and gained weight after leaving the RAF. Looks different now. But Mrs. Disley caught the likeness. Seeing Marcia in the selfsame uniform put the resemblance into sharp focus. Hence her collapse.

"It never struck her before. Then again, Mr. Kerns hasn't looked quite like that for years, and the look only emerged in Marcia as she grew up—the way it happens with youngsters. My daughter was

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the image of her mum for a while, now she favors me, poor little soul."

Mr. Tilling nodded shakenly. "But if this picture was with Brenda's things, Roy Kerns must have cleared himself at the time."

Inspector Chadbon scowled. "The trouble was, Brenda collected scalps, in a manner of speaking. Her dressing-table drawer was crammed with snapshots, love notes, and so forth. Up to thirty men were interviewed just on the basis of her having their *pictures*.

"Roy Kerns owned the transport café at the time. I looked up the notes on his interview and he said he knew Brenda only by sight. She hung around the café, hitching lifts—and more, no doubt. That snapshot was tucked into a mirror by the cash register, Kerns explained. If she had it, she'd pinched it—maybe to brag she'd pulled a toff, an ex-officer." The policeman's smile was chilly. "He hardly hated himself, Mr. Kerns, but it sounded credible. Claim that she was linked to him by the café and any defense lawyer would shout that hundreds of customers could be linked the same way."

Chadbon hesitated. "The officer in charge of the investigation never picked up on one point that hit me in the eye all these years later. Brenda *didn't* brag about knowing Mr. Kerns. She never mentioned him to her mother."

Mr. Tilling, sensing that he was being played like a fish, rapped his knuckles on the desk. "What do you want from me, Inspector?"

Again Chadbon evaded answering. "Mrs. Disley's clear about what I must do. Arrest Mr. Kerns on suspicion of making away with her daughter. It all hangs together in her mind. Kerns got Brenda pregnant, promised to marry her, and may have meant it—but then he started romancing the Squire's daughter. Chance to step up financially *and* classwise. So he killed Brenda and hid the body. But I need more than that. I need at least one more straw in the wind."

Scratching his head, Chadbon began pacing the study as if it were a quarterdeck. "Say he did kill the poor lass—where's the likely place to hide the body? Where he lived or where he worked, experience tells us. Meaning the café, because Mr. Kerns had a flat on the premises."

The policeman grinned and rubbed his hands, making Mr. Tilling feel queasy. "Right. The café's derelict now. Council opened the bypass, end of passing trade. Scheduled for demolition, the present owners have given me a free hand to investigate.

"What does every transport café have? Ruddy great parking area, naturally. But Mr. Kerns put in about twenty square yards of con-

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crete round the back—for vehicles, he said at the time. Funny thing to do, him having just the one car—seen in hindsight, that is."

Inspector Chadbon's workmanlike pleasure was brief. "But drilling that concrete out and digging underneath could take days—a lot of police time and public funds all for a theory. I'm out on a limb, see, and if I'm wrong it will be rotten publicity for the Force and Mr. Kerns will go running to a tame Member of Parliament, yelling persecution and defamation of character."

Chadbon held the vicar with a foxy, yellowish stare. "Strange the way ladies tend to be better than men at spotting a family resemblance. Mr. Tilling, I need that other straw. So tell me—I know who made little Marcia's costume, but whose idea was it to hold a Fancy Dress at your fete?"

"I think you know that, too," Mr. Tilling whispered. "Sophie Kerns virtually insisted on it. She put up the prize money and persuaded me to include the event."

"Just so." Inspector Chadbon's cunning look mellowed. "Very oblique, the ladies can be. I had a word with Mrs. Kerns earlier today. Purely routine as I told her—matter of locating her husband. She's a most polite lady, but she couldn't help. Then again, she had already, eh? I understand she and Mr. Kerns are separating—divorce around the corner. It's never a good idea if you have secrets, ditching a trusted partner. Well, I'll be seeing you, sir."

Mr. Tilling saw the Inspector on the TV news a few days later, with the derelict transport café in the background and an ambulance pulling away. Chadbon, full of himself, was intoning, "All I can say is that, acting on information received, we have discovered female remains on this site and that a certain person is assisting with our inquiries."

In due time, Roy Kerns went to prison for murder and, after divorcing him, Sophie sold the hotel and went to Spain, opening a package-tour resort bar, old Mrs. Disley having staunchly refused her efforts to foster Marcia.

After the old lady's death of a heart attack some while later, the aunt at Bristol turned Marcia out and the child went to a foster home.

In due time, Market Tracy church held another fete. But the Reverend Simon Tilling wouldn't hear of it featuring a Fancy Dress contest.

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DETECTIVERSE

THE BEGGAR

by WILLIAM C. THOMAS

In bustling old Threadneedle Street
A beggar plies his trade.
Beside some vestas in a cup
His greasy cap is laid.
A jagged scar curls up his lip
And tugs upon his eye—
The sight of him is pitiful
To all the passersby.
Each day he entertains the crowds
With quick, sardonic wit.
The cap soon fills with copper pence,
Until they barely fit.
Near five, the beggar gives a yawn
And rises from his seat—
He walks to Upper Swandam Lane
Upon his crippled feet.
The beggar has a filthy room
Above an opium den.
He checks his pocket watch against
The chiming of Big Ben.
The crippled beggar changes clothes
As fast as he is able—
The twisted lip is taken off
And placed upon the table.
A costly business suit is donned—
The rags are cast aside.
He sets a hat atop his head—
His tie is deftly tied.
The beggar hails a hansom cab,
And names a place in Kent.
He steps inside and ponders
How his money shall be spent.
He strides into his stately home
And hands his son some blocks.
He gives his wife a loving kiss.
She thinks he deals in stocks.

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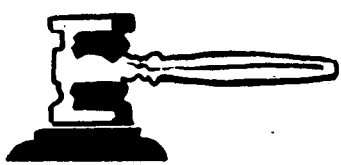
a ***NEW*** short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Bentley's statement on arrest was that Susan Miller had gone to the bathroom to fix him a bubblebath—a good thought as he had ridden the bus most of the hot May day and drunk beer most of the night, and was ripe. But he hadn't taken the bath—while she was fixing it, he had bailed out.

Robert Twohy has published more than three dozen stories in EQMM alone. He just won a scroll from the Mystery Writers of America for having written one of the best mystery short stories of last year ("Breakfast at Ojai," in the September 1984 EQMM). We think "The Raven" rates as one of his best stories to date and that Mr. Twohy is a great original, in the tradition of Hammett and Chandler but with a voice very much his own, characters very much his own.

Besides writing, Robert Twohy has worked part-time in the District Attorney's Aid to Victims and Witnesses program and as GED counselor at San Mateo County Jail. He has been a trials buff all his life and is "avid for Lustgarten, Roughead, Pearson, Bolitho, and now Clark Howard's studies of Zebra and George Jackson . . ."



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THE RAVEN

by ROBERT TWOHY

The murder was early Saturday morning. Bentley was arrested Sunday evening at the hotel where he'd checked in late Friday afternoon. So he hadn't skipped town, a small point in his favor that I mentioned to Milt Josten, the deputy DA handling the case.

He wasn't impressed. "Too screwed up on beer to get his act together and take off."

I moved on to Point Two, the trickier and also the last of my pro-Bentley points: "Susan Miller wouldn't have stripped down for a bath with him still in the apartment."

He got a small smile. "Wasn't stripping down the idea?"

"Sure, but later—in her bedroom; by soft light or moonlight. She wouldn't have risked that he'd see her as she was, wig off and no makeup, by hard bathroom light."

Josten chewed on that. He'd have liked to come back, "All she had to do was lock the bathroom door," but that wouldn't work because that door had to be unlocked or Bentley couldn't have sneaked into the bathroom and cut her throat.

His statement on arrest was that Susan Miller had gone into the bathroom to fix him a bubblebath—a good thought as he had ridden on the bus most of that hot May day and drunk beer most of the night, and was ripe. But he hadn't taken the bath—while she was fixing it, he had bailed out.

His explanation as to why wasn't too convincing—but often things done on impulse are hard to account for later.

Josten said, "If she had come out of the bathroom and found him gone, she'd have locked and bolted the apartment door."

I said that if he wanted Bentley too screwed up on beer to skip town, I'd give him Susan too screwed up on vodka-tonics to focus on locking up.

Police reports said that her apartment door had a bolt—also a gizmo in the knob that locked when turned vertical. Bentley had said that on leaving he hadn't thought about locks, just pulled the door shut behind him.

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Saturday about 1:00 P.M., Susan Miller's daughter had arrived for a lunch date with her mother, who didn't respond to the outside bell. Figuring she might be in the tub and not hearing—right on both counts—the daughter rang 101, the manager, who knew her and let her in. Not worried, she trotted upstairs to 241, got no answer at the bell there, and tried the knob. The door opened and she went in, pushed the slightly open bathroom door to—and saw what she saw.

From Josten's desk I picked up two softly lit studio portraits of Susan Miller. Dated two years ago by the photographer, they showed a young woman with bright blue eyes, glowing skin, softly shining black hair to her shoulders, a half-smile with more than a hint of mischief. Josten had told me that they had been in silver frames in her bedroom. So she had been proud of them, with reason.

Also on his desk was a small stack of police photos, in hard, brutal light, of her in the tub—patchy brown-grey hair, blotchy middle-aging face, throat slashed four or five times. Black hair and a sexy blue negligee hung on hooks on the door. The two bottom photos, taken after the bloody water was drained, showed the murder weapon in the tub by her bent knees, where the killer apparently had tossed it—a wood-handled paring knife with a six-inch blade, one from a set in her kitchen.

I had come to Josten's space in the DA's Office, third floor County Courthouse, to feel around as to where we stood. This was a Friday in late June. Last Monday I'd been named for Bentley, having hit on top of the list of lawyers who sign up to defend indigents for county wages—better than no wages, which I collect too often as one of too many lawyers working San Mateo County, which I'd been doing twenty-plus years, averaging in that time about what a medium-sharp cabdriver earns. I'm competent, but a passionate affair with booze cost me a wife, a reputation, and probably a bunch of clients. That morning booze and wife were in the past, reputation was on the mend, and bunches of clients were in the near future, I could hope.

Josten looked at his watch. "Anything else?"

"Motive?" Nothing had been taken, far as known, and detectives had found a good wad of bills in Susan's handbag in the living room.

"Hatred of women, sexual gratification from savaging women." By which I got it that in pre-trial he'd push for admission of Bentley's Fresno record. In which event I'd squawk that as evidence of a previous crime it was prejudicial, inflammatory, and so forth. He'd come back that as indicative of Bentley's attitude toward women

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and of a tendency to violence, hence relevant to establishment of motive, it was essential to his case.

I didn't think that the presiding judge, whoever, would go for that, but as he might I'd better scrape up some ammunition for Fresno, which I didn't have yet.

I looked again at the radiant lady in the beautiful black wig, on which she had spent a bundle, as she had on cosmetics and nighttime outfits expertly engineered to hitch up here, flatten down there.

Detectives had learned from several tenants in the building that late some weekend nights they had glimpsed a darkly beautiful young feline flitting down a hall or sliding into the grey Toyota parked in space 241 in the garage under the building—which was the tipoff that the pleasant-faced woman with greying brown hair who lived alone in Apartment 241, looking and acting like a settled widow with a responsible office job, which were facts, had a fun side to her.

And in the small hours there had been glimpses of her returning with a man, or rather different men, sometimes nondescript, sometimes spiffily dressed—each time young.

Nobody claimed or admitted that he or she had glimpsed the dark temptress, alone or escorted, that Friday night.

With copies of the bedroom photos, the detectives fanned out to research the fancier boozewallows in the area, picking up here and there an identification of the lady as a sometime customer who would arrive alone and sometimes leave with a young man—but no word that she had put in an appearance Friday night.

After the nifty spas, they checked out the dumps, eventually hitting Pogy's—El Camino near downtown—where the bartender said yeah, that gorgeous woman had come in alone last night about midnight, leaving about 1:00 A.M. with a slim blondy guy in a beat-up canvas jacket who had come in about ten minutes after her.

Had the bartender ever seen either of them before? No. Who had picked up who? She had picked him up, sending him a look down the bar that was an offer he'd have to be sick or gay to refuse, neither of which he was it seemed.

Did she look as young as the photos? She looked in her late twenties and terrific, bringing the bartender mellow movie memories of the young Liz Taylor. How about the guy? He looked like a kid on the drift, though pleasant enough. Quiet voice. Not a goon or a skag. He'd paid for a round, she'd bought a couple. They'd had three rounds in the hour—she drank vodka-tonic, he drank Coors.

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Had the bartender overheard any of their conversation? He heard the guy mention that this was his first night in Redwood City.

Figuring that if guilty the young drifter would be long gone, they looked for him anyway—and late Sunday afternoon, at the fleabag Wooster Hotel a block and a half from Greyhound, learned that a young guy like the bartender described had checked in late Friday afternoon and was still registered: Theo Bentley, San Francisco.

They found him in his room, passed out, empty Coors cans around, canvas jacket on the floor. They arrested him and he made a statement, they took him to jail and booked him on suspicion of murder.

That was my client, who I hadn't met yet.

It was past 11:00 A.M. I thought I might as well browse the murder scene, if accessible. If not, I'd talk to the manager and a tenant or two. I didn't expect anything that I hadn't learned already from police reports and other material, but how do you know until you try? After trying, I'd pay a call on Bentley.

Josten had a case, but barely. No witnesses, no fingerprints on the murder knife, no blood marks on his clothes, no information concerning him that he hadn't volunteered on arrest.

Things looked not too bad—if I could keep Fresno out.

I walked five blocks to the El Camino, took a southbound 5L to Woodside Road, and walked six blocks west and a block or so south to 1138 Farnley Way, a four-story hive with all the charm that acres of white plaster and glass give a place.

The big glass entrance door was locked. On one wall was a board with about forty doorbells, most with names on laminated strips in slots. The slot by 241 was empty. I rang 101, Saverman, MGR.

He appeared, a short wide gent in his sixties. I showed my card, said I was Theo Bentley's attorney, and might I have a look at 241, which I see isn't occupied?

He sucked his teeth a while but, probably feeling not up to a hassle, took me up an inside stairway to 241.

No furniture, empty closets and cabinets, bare floors. I looked in the clean bathroom. The lock, a button you pressed, seemed okay—if Susan had wanted privacy for her bath, she could have had it.

At the entrance door I fiddled with the bolt and the gizmo, noted no defects. "Are all these locks the same as at the time of the murder?" I asked Saverman. He looked confused. "They haven't been worked on, or replaced?" He looked more confused.

"Why should I replace perfectly good locks?"

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No reason I could think of. "Is the outside door downstairs always locked?"

"Always. Tenants have their key. Nobody else gets in without they ring."

Bentley had said that Susan had parked in the basement garage, unlocking a door down there that opened onto the stairs. Was that door always locked, too? Same refrain, like that great old ballad—"Always."

Which was no help but no great harm, either. Plenty of residents inside the building, any or all of whom could have slid into 241 after Bentley left—if he'd left the door unlocked and if Susan had neglected to lock it later, which would be our line.

The medical guess was that her life had ended sometime past 2:00 and certainly before 4:00 A.M. Saturday, May 22. Bentley's tale was that he had split about 2:30. Nobody had seen him leave, or arrive at the Wooster, or in between—leaving an hour and a half for anyone to walk into the apartment and slay Susan in her unlocked bathroom.

I prowled around, my mind on the tenant angle. "Did Mrs. Miller get on well with other residents here?"

Saverman had never heard otherwise.

"Ever hear of her being particularly friendly or having any problems with anyone?"

"No." His scowl told me he didn't like this. The cops had the killer—an outsider. Was I trying to shift the trouble back onto the apartment building?

I was—but along with the tenantry, I had a statistical entry running for me: the fact that more often than not, savage murders turn out to be committed by someone who knew the victim well. Susan's killer could be a man of her past—or a woman—who had happened to come around after Bentley took off, rang the downstairs bell in a special way . . .

We went downstairs, Saverman calling me a cab as I'd had my exercise for the day, and I went back to the Courthouse.

After a sandwich and coffee in the basement cafeteria, it was 2:00 P.M. The elevator floated me up to the fourth floor.

I told the deputy at the window who I was and that I'd like to confer with my client, The Bentley, 4-AC. Three minutes later, I was in a conference cell, $6 \times 10'$ with grey-brick walls, two camp chairs, and linoleum with cigarette burns.

Two minutes more and a slim-faced lad with shaggy blond hair

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appeared in the prescribed uniform of this and every jail day—a droopy orange romper suit. Dressed like a grownup, trimmed and shaved, he'd look okay for a jury.

Clear brown eyes were steady on mine.

I said my name and that I was his lawyer. His smile was pleasant, appropriately wary.

He was twenty-three, Susan Miller's daughter's age. Susan had been two years past twice that last May 23.

The deputy who had brought him told me to knock on the glass when I wanted out and left, slamming and locking the steel door.

We sat across the width of the cell and I riffled pages in my notebook, figuring where to begin. He said low but clear, "I didn't kill that lady."

"Ever see her before that night?"

"I was never in Redwood City before that day."

"Never saw her anyplace else?"

"No."

"Why did you stop at Pogy's that night?"

"No reason. I was browsing the town, had checked a couple other joints, then dropped in there."

"What happened when you and she left there?"

"She drove us to her place, got me a beer and herself a drink. I was on the couch. She went in the bedroom and came back in a negligee. She sat down and we started fooling around. She got us another drink—"

"How old did you figure her?"

"Twenty-seven, twenty-eight."

"Dim light at Pogy's?"

"Usual barroom light."

"How about her place?"

"She put one lamp on."

"When did you find out how old she really was?"

"When the detectives told me."

"So after a couple of drinks and fooling around, what?"

"She said she'd fix me a bath. I'd sponged off at the hotel, changed my shirt and shorts, but it seemed like a good idea. So she went and started the water."

"What happened then?"

"I took off."

"Just like that?"

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He nodded. I looked at my notes. He had told the detectives that he was bushed, three-fourths drunk, felt suddenly inadequate, not up to the job at hand, and bailed out. I quoted him that.

He ran a hand through his thick hair, shook his head, got up a thin smile. "I said that because the real reason was so silly I knew they wouldn't believe it."

"Try it on me."

"Okay. She went to fix the bath and suddenly I thought, what gives? Why'd she pick up on *me?* What was she doing in that crummy bar, a class lady like her? Was I being set up for something?"

"Like what?"

"I flashed on a movie I'd seen on TV. They needed a body so the guy's wife would get a big insurance payoff—"

"What guy's wife?"

"Guy in the movie, Mitchum or somebody. His wife went out to find a bum with a build like him, picks up this guy in a rotten bar, takes him home. Mitchum or whoever's in the closet, comes up behind him, and bops him. They put Mitchum's clothes on him—wristwatch, wallet, and so-forth. He drives him up in the hills, the wife following in their other car. He splashes a can of gas around in *his* car, soaking the bum good, sets it on fire, and they shove it over a cliff. You see it bouncing, it blows up." He got on a half grin. "I said it was silly."

It was, but so what? Beered up, groggy, he'd flashed on a scary movie, got paranoid, and split—I could make it seem reasonable to a jury. Reasonable enough if for whatever reason they hadn't got down on him.

"When you split, you told the cops you didn't lock the door."

"I just pulled it shut."

"With her in the bathroom, fixing your bathwater? Where'd you go?"

"Back to the hotel." A mile-and-a-half walk, no witnesses. "I lay down, passed out."

"How about the next day, Saturday?"

"I slept late. I walked around some, had some beers and some food—went back to the hotel, slept some more."

"Did you go around to Susan Miller's?"

"No."

"Still feeling paranoid?"

"No, like a clown. I was ashamed to see her."

"Did you stop at Pogy's?"

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"No."

It would help slightly if he had, indicating clear conscience—but no harm that he hadn't. "How about Sunday?"

"Read the papers in the hotel." Sunday papers had brought no news of the murder—not until Monday, when it came all in a package with the story of his arrest. "Went to a few joints, watched some of a ballgame. Got a six-pack and went back to the hotel. Then the cops came and arrested me."

I looked at my watch. Two thirty-five. I'd learned some things—mostly that I got good feelings from this kid, and believed him so far.

"Tell me about Fresno."

"I didn't hurt that woman." *I didn't kill that lady.*

I had flipped to my Fresno notes. "She identified you." He nodded. "You told the Fresno cops that you went to her place with her that night."

"Yeah. I was in the park there. She came along and asked if I was looking for some action."

"Were you?" The report said that Jennie Hodges, thirty-two, was well known to Fresno cops as a no-problem prostitute.

"Sure. I had money—nearly two hundred dollars. I still had about a hundred and sixty when they arrested me." That had been last February. "Good way to save money—go to jail." He smiled faintly.

I gave back a similar, for fellowship. "Had you ever seen Jennie Hodges before that night?"

"No."

"What happened at her place?"

"Nothing. I mean, we couldn't do business. She'd said ten, or I thought she had, now it was twenty-five."

Jennie Hodges had told the Fresno cops that the man put $25.00 on the table, then suddenly freaked, grabbed up her shoes, and started clubbing her in the face with the heel. She was in bed at the time.

Bentley shook his head. "I never laid out any money—just said sorry, and left." His clear eyes were steady on mine.

"That was what time at night?"

"About eleven."

About noon the next day Jennie was out on the street, no clothes, her face bloody and smashed. Cops took her to the hospital. When she could talk she said it was a young blond guy in a green sweater

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and grey workpants. They picked Bentley up in a bar in the neighborhood next day and took him to the hospital. She identified him.

He nodded. "After I left, she must of gone out and brought home another guy, which she didn't remember. I've heard that sometimes when it's concussion you can black out for some hours before it happened."

"So you think she might have blacked out on a guy she brought home later."

"It must be what happened."

"Why did you cop to guilty?"

"The lawyer they gave me said the DA would go for a deal—simple assault, six months' county time less good time. He said if I didn't go for it I could get five years or more hard time. Intent to kill, other charges. I went for it. But I never beat up that woman."

Jennie had said that she lay all night, waking up and passing out, until about noon, when she came to long enough to know she had to get to the hospital. So she had staggered out—

"I wasn't the guy."

She had said that when Bentley came at her with the shoe, his face was all twisted, crazy—

"She saw somebody else's face, not mine." Another old ballad.

"What were you doing in Fresno?"

"Nothing. I mean, I just happened to be there. I got temporary jobs through a labor agency, was there about two months. I was about to move on when they arrested me."

So that was the Fresno story—his version and no help at all. Even if true the opposite. A jury's not going to believe that a guy goes home with a woman, leaves her, somebody else comes in, and savages her—not twice in six months they're not.

I'd do what I could about Fresno later, maybe tomorrow. "Why did you come to Redwood City?"

"They cut me loose that Friday morning. I had money, so I took the bus north to San Francisco. I hate that city, but L.A.'s worse. I don't like cities, everything's crazy—I like small country towns."

Some sketchy background notes Josten had dug out said that Bentley had been raised in a town called Henniker, which I'd located on a road map near the mouth of the Russian River in Sonoma County, upcoast a hundred miles from San Francisco. He had been adopted at age four from an orphanage in San Francisco by a couple who it seems later moved to Henniker. But at age fourteen he was back in San Francisco in a home for waywards, from which a year

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later he took off—and had drifted around California doing nothing admirable or harmful, as far as recorded, until Fresno.

"So you took the bus to San Francisco. Then what?"

"I figured I'd go up toward Ukiah. I worked on a farm there once—liked it. But in the depot in San Francisco I saw a gate marked Redwood City, where I'd never been. It sounded cool and shady and I thought, give it a look, maybe I'll like it."

Which tied in with the idea of sudden impulses, acted on without thought—like splitting Susan Miller's. "So you came here because of the name."

"That's all. But I didn't see any of those cool redwoods—" faint smile "—just another dumb, hot city. Cement and billboards, traffic, plaster. A hotel sign was a block from the depot and I headed there, got a room, and passed out for the next few hours."

Bringing the time to mid-evening, May 22. So I had the full picture of his day that Friday—jail in Fresno in the A.M., Greyhound to S.F., then to Redwood City, Wooster Hotel, sleep, wake, hit some joints. One led to another and finally to Pogy's—where in the dim light a witchily dressed young woman with shining black hair gave him a look like a promise.

He sat quiet, watching me. I said, "Why did you get sent to a home for waywards?"

He flicked his tongue over his lips. "Somebody said I stole something."

"What?"

"Nothing. It was all a lie."

"Was that in Henniker?"

He nodded.

"Have you ever been back there?"

He shook his head.

"How about your parents?"

"They moved, or died—I dunno." He was looking off.

With a quarter I rapped on the glass and told him I'd be around in a few days. He nodded, said thanks for coming. His eyes were steady and clear on mine.

The trip to Fresno is okay if you like Greyhound, which I've tried to since letting my license go following the last accident which got me off booze. Being at least eighty percent convinced that Theo Bentley had told me the truth and that, weird as it seemed, twice inside six months he'd left a woman just before savagery came down

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on her, I wanted to talk to Jennie Hodges and find out from her own lips and by her eyes and manner if she was still positive Bentley was the guy who had beat on her.

I cabbed to the 800 block of Blayden Street, featuring rundown houses and apartments on the north side and small-bore businesses on the south, including a bar called Turtle's Place, a barber named Clyde, a thrift store, and a coffee shop run by Ann.

Eight fourteen had a junky mailbox with six slots, two with names penciled on and neither name Hodges. I climbed a dozen old wooden steps and headed accross a porch to a door, which opened, and a lean young woman came out and stopped. Mid-twenties, in a light-blue blouse and neat grey slacks, carring a floppy grey purse, she stood sizing me up with cool brown eyes in a honey-brown face.

I said I was looking for Jennie Hodges. She didn't answer. I showed her my card, which she scanned with a faint sneer and didn't take. I repocketed it. "Does she live here?"

No answer.

Rapport was nonexistent but something female was working for me—curiosity. She wondered what a Redwood City lawyer was doing in Fresno on a hot Saturday afternoon, seeking Jennie Hodges, who I guessed she knew.

After a while she murmured, "She's moved."

"Do you know where?"

"Try Cincinnati."

"You mean the city?" She might mean a local street or hotel.

"That's right—Cincy Oh."

I frowned and shook my head, increasing her curiosity. "Whada you want with her?"

"Somebody beat her up last January—I'm defending the man she identified." Jennie had gone to Cincy Oh, if she had—but if I could get the comely brown Miss talking, I might get something.

She drawled, "Whad he do—murder someone?"

"He's a suspect in a murder."

"Woman?" I nodded. "Figures."

I let that go by. "Can I buy you a drink?" —nodding at Turtle's dump.

"Information, huh?" She got a one-corner smile. "Less and less things this cold world come free."

"Ten bucks?" I flashed on Bentley's story about Jennie—would this woman, probably also a pro, say okay, then hold out for $25.00?

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If so, my answer would be the same as Bentley's, if that were true—"Sorry," and I'd split.

She paced down the stairs and sashayed across the street, me behind.

Turtle's was a sad, dreary den, nudes on velvet and stained chrome fixings accenting the dreariness. The culprit on duty said drearily, "Hey, Diane," and the four or five misspent lives spaced along the stick lit up briefly and barely. She smiled in a nice way, the guy got her a screwdriver and me a Calistoga, no glass. She carried her drink to a banged-up booth at the side, me on her heels.

"Ten dollars you said." It went in a wallet from the floppy purse. "Whad you want to know?"

"Why don't you just talk about her a little?" If you let people ramble their own way, sometimes something pops up that gives a direction to follow.

She shrugged, took a bunch of cards and photos from the wallet, which she frowned at as she sorted through, then murmured, "Yeah," and put in front of me a 2×3" color shot of herself and a big woman with a wide face, both in neat summer outfits, leaning on each other and grinning at the camera. There was a pond and some trees in the background.

"Is that Jennie?" Her best feature was crisply cut reddish hair, possibly real but probably a wig or a dye job. Otherwise I had to agree with Bentley—not worth $25.00. Lumpy figure, chalky white face, fairly pretty but looking puffy and strained.

My thought must have showed. Diane said, "She never photographed good: But at night, all fixed up, she looked fine." She slid the picture back into the wallet and said softly, "No more though—she'll never look fine no more no more," softly chanting new lyrics for a good old song.

Long fingers stroking her smooth cheek, she gazed off. "One cheek knobbly, other caved in—one eye half size. Tell that dude congratulations, he really did a number on her." Lips were thin, eyes were cold—bitterness directed at men in general maybe, not just Bentley.

She drank and was quiet a while. Then: "At the hospital she was all bandages. Then I didn't see her for a week or so. Then I got a knock on the door and this grey-haired old lady with a lopsize face says, 'Hi, Diane.' I dunno who she is—rather I know, but don't believe it. She says, 'Look what he done to me, and cry with me.' "

She dropped her head and laid a long slim hand over her eyes. It was partly real and partly an act, like most things.

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I kept quiet. She raised her head, with that one-edged smile. "Life in the streets, huh?"

Grey-haired. So the pretty reddish hair of the photo *wasn't* real. "How old is Jennie?"

"I dunno. Old enough to have a daughter runs a burger joint in Cincy Oh. Told her to come out there, work part-time, take care of the kids."

"So she's a grandmother."

"Yeah."

"A report said she was thirty-two."

She blew a soft laugh down her nose. "Somebody must of hit a wrong key."

Whatever, Jennie was way over thirty-two—although at night, fixed up, she looked fine. "When you saw her last, was she still sure the guy was Bentley?"

"She was sure. Said she saw him in bright light when he came at her, face all twisted and crazy."

Bright light. If Bentley had gone in the bathroom, he'd have seen Susan Miller in bright light, lots older than she'd pretended. Jennie Hodges was lots older than she'd pretended. Ideas groped for each other, trying to connect.

"Jennie was in bed with the light on?"

"No. She had the light out and everything was quiet, dark—then, whang, like a movie when they want to scare the hell out of you, all of a sudden hard bright light, a monster face all wild zooming at you on the screen. She said she'd never forget it—sudden bright light and that face coming at her."

"Had he switched on a light?"

"No. An alley behind the ground floor rear where she had her room. Cars aren't supposed to use it but sometimes they do. That's what must of happened that night—car come down the alley and lit up the room, she saw your friend coming at her, face all crazy."

Her glass was empty. I took it to the bar and returned it full. She nodded. "If I said anything to help your friend, I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it."

"I don't worry. What's gone to come down will." She gave me a small lift of the glass, meaning that we didn't part enemies. Good—who needs enemies? I've always got myself.

Back at my place late Saturday, fairly sick of bus rides, I asked Information if there was a listing for a Bentley in Henniker, Sonoma

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County. She said there were some Bentleys listed in the county but none in Henniker.

I saw another bus ride in my future.

Not Sunday, though. Sunday I put Susan's murder, Jennie's messed-up face, and Bentley's cloudy past and future on hold while I went to the coast south of Half Moon with a woman I knew, in her Pinto. We picnicked, then sported in a middle-aging way on the beach. Then back to Redwood City, dinner at Scotty Campbell's, then on to her apartment and so forth.

She worked at the *Chronicle,* Seventh and Mission, and early Monday I rode in with her and walked half a block to Greyhound. About 11:00 A.M. I got off the bus at Cotati, Sonoma County.

A local bus took me west, and after a while we were riding down the highway along the Russian River, stopping at resort towns until we reached the last one on the river, where the bus stops and goes back, leaving me still ten miles from Henniker, not a resort town. To get there I could flag a ride, hike, swim downriver, or hire a cab.

The driver didn't know anyone named Bentley in Henniker or anywhere else. I had him take me to the town center—a long frame building that was a combined restaurant, grocery, and U.S. Post Office. A few yards away was a gas station, across the highway a bait shop. No other buildings were near. On a long, high hillside above the highway were scattered houses and on the slope down to the river some more. That was Henniker—Pop. 300, said the sign coming in. Retirees, artists, fisherfolk, and assorted ilk who preferred life in the slow lane.

I paid $18.00 and a $5.00 tip and he asked if he should wait. I said no, I'd call him later if he'd give me a card, which he did.

Inside the long building to the left was the grocery, to the right the restaurant, and straight ahead the P.O.

Behind the single cage a slim, pretty lady smiled at me and got my best in return. I put my card in front of her and said I was trying to locate a family named Bentley, did she know them?

"The only Bentleys I remember moved away at least eight years ago."

"There was a son named Theo."

She gave a slow nod.

"I'm trying to find out something that might have happened about ten years ago."

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The nice face closed in a little and she shook her head. I got the idea that she knew what I referred to and wasn't about to tell me.

I could go to the grocery and the restaurant, the gas station and the bait shop and maybe find out something, but more likely not. Then I could poke around on the hill and probably learn what I suspected already—that small-town people tend to clam up concerning local affairs.

But I was here, so I'd give it a go.

The slim woman murmured, "Try Ella Banks."

"Who's she?"

"A friend of mine." She had a slight smile. "She might feel like helping you."

"Where will I find her?"

"Half a mile north, the highway turns right. There's a path left, down to the river. Green house with abalone shells on the roof."

I thanked her and wended north, and in a few minutes I was gazing down a primitive dirt path that pushed through weeds and beachgrass to a small green shack with a roof as described. Two minutes later I was at a dutch door with the top open, looking into a cluttered little room beyond a kitchen. "Mmm Banks?" I slurred it, not knowing if she was Miss, Mrs. or Ms.

A big voice said, "Enter!"

I did, into a neatly cluttered kitchen. Immediately left was a big plain table and at the far end of it a big woman in a ragged grey sweater with loose grey hair falling around a wide, strong face. Heaps of papers and some heavy books crowded that end of the table. A mug of coffee was at one hand, a ballpoint in the other. She growled, "I'm writing a book—know any dirty jokes?" Wide lips stretched—she had bright lavender eyes with a lot of wry.

"Some. Are you writing a dirty-joke book?"

"Certainly not. It's a thoughtful study of the California legislature." Ignoring my smile, she flopped a wide hand at a saucepan on the stove and I took it that I should put water in and turn the gas on under it. The task done, I set my card in front of her. "A lady in town said maybe you could help me with some information."

"I know. Elinor at the post office. She called me you were coming. The water's boiling."

I put Folger's from a big jar into a mug and filled it with hot water. She held out her mug and I fixed her a fresh cup. She didn't mention cream or sugar so I didn't either.

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She sized me up. "She said she got good feelings from you. She won't spread dirt herself but knows I will if I feel like it."

"What makes you think I'm after dirt?"

"Because you asked her about the Bentleys."

I took a chair at an angle to her at the table. "Did you know them?"

"They lived across the river. From the front you can see their house—red roof, upriver a ways, down near the water."

I moved from the kitchen into the neatly cluttered front room that was living-bedroom and looked out the glass end of it at the river, across which and near the water were half a dozen houses well spread from each other. At the far end upriver was a long house with a red roof.

I came back and sat. "Did you know them well?"

"No."

"There was a son, Theo. He's a suspect in a murder in Redwood City. I'm defending him."

She watched me.

"Something happened in Henniker about ten years ago—I'm trying to find out what."

She nodded. "He was alone that night. His room was at the far end of the house. Some jewelry was missing and the living room was a mess—spray-paint all around, the walls and the rugs, all the furniture. Dirty words spelled in yellow spray-paint."

"What words?"

"You name them, they were there. The father said that when he got home early in the morning the front door was unlocked, which the boy would forget sometimes. Deputies found the jewelry and two empty yellow spray-cans under his bed behind other junk."

"Where were his parents that night?"

"She was in the hospital in Santa Rosa. That was fairly regular, every three or four months or so, to dry out—she was alcoholic. That's the story anyway—none of this is first-hand, just talk that spread around. Nothing got in the papers, it was all kept private. The father was in the City overnight, had a conference or something—he was a business consultant of some kind with an office in Santa Rosa. We weren't friends. They had their life, I had mine. I think they kept to themselves as most people do here. All I or anybody else in town knew about them we heard from Rose Clancy. She used to work for them—clean-up work, serve if he gave a business dinner, wash up, and so forth. She worked for everybody here. Some-

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body wanted a domestic job done, they'd call Rose. She knew a lot about everybody and was glad to tell if you asked, or drop hints if you didn't, to get things started."

"Does she still live in Henniker?"

"She died."

I worked things around. "Why would Theo stick the jewelry and spray-cans under his bed? Why not bury them outside somewhere?"

"From here we move into rumor." Suddenly she touched her loose hair and the eyes got big and soft, the voice murmurous. "Also, an actress has trouble separating fact from fiction."

"Are you an actress?"

"Strange you should ask—are you psychic?" She snorted a laugh, then gazed off with a kind of sardonic nostalgia. "My ideal was Constance Bennett, who did *Topper* with Cary Grant. I looked a little like her, but mostly I wanted to play with Cary, in every sense of the word. So I left Denver and went to Hollywood to be discovered."

"Were you?"

"Strangely, I was. That was early Forties. Nothing much came of it, though, and I never met Cary. All I had was talent, which they didn't need as they had Bette and Ingrid and a few others for that. So I checked into UCLA, got some degrees, and wound up at Sonoma State, a professor of political science. I acted on the side—little theater. It was fun, I was good. Want me to show you?" She held up a hand. "Who cares what you want, I'll show you anyway. I'll do Rose Clancy."

She closed her eyes, sat still for a minute, taking deep breaths, and then opened them, slid down in her chair, clawed the air vaguely, shifted around, sucked in her cheeks, and lengthened her jaw. I got the idea that Rose Clancy had been a small woman with wide slidy eyes and quick spidery hands. A breathy voice whispered, "The way his mother looks sometimes—" The lips pinched in and she stared at fingers picking at a few crumbs in front of her. "I don't think I should say more."

I got the mood, clearly the place to be. "I promise I won't repeat anything."

"Well, all I'm going to say is that he's a nice-looking lad, well built you know, and becoming more so." She blew a sigh and shook her head, her wide eyes on me. "But maybe it's me. Maybe I see in her eyes what's in *my* mind, not hers."

I picked up the cue. "Maybe it's in her mind, too."

"D'you think so?" The lavender eyes got sly. "*He* thinks so."

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"Theo thinks so?"

"No, his father."

"His father thinks she looks at Theo in a certain way?"

"That's what I see in his eyes when he looks at her sometimes when she's looking that way at Theo."

"How does she look at Theo?"

"Not like a mother."

"Has the husband ever said anything to her?"

"Not as I've heard."

"So all you know is how she looks at Theo, and how his father looks at her."

"That's all. And it could be all *my* feelings about the boy, not hers at all." She stabbed at crumbs and blew a sigh. "I've always been like that. When I was twelve I was like that, and at sixty-four I'm like that. I'm afraid I'll just keep on being like that." She raised her head. "Can I help it if I get turned on by hunks?"

I laughed and she grinned, but the eyes stayed sly and slippery—Rose Clancy's eyes.

I swallowed the tail of my laugh and looked stern. "Be serious, Rose. Tell me about the night of the spray-paint."

"I can't—I wasn't there. But I can tell you what got around."

"Tell me."

"His father got home from the City before dawn, found the door unlocked, paint all around, the dirty words, jewelry missing, boy still in bed. He called the sheriff and they looked around and found the spray-cans and jewelry under Theo's bed. He said he hadn't done anything, but if that was true they could have all kinds of problems, if you know what I mean—"

"I don't."

"He was an important man in the county. Semi-important, anyway."

"Theo's father, you mean."

"Yes. There was a hearing or something—county people and juvenile authorities and such—and it was decided that the boy must have a lot of hidden hatred to have done what he did, and needed a different environment for a while, so they put him in county care, I think. Later I heard that he'd wound up in San Francisco somehow, in a correction-type place."

"What was his father like?"

"Twitchy little man. Everything twitched—hands, mouth, eyes.

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She was big and soft, younger than he, forty maybe. Baby face, silly way of talking sometimes, wore blonde curly wig most of the time."

"Did his father frame Theo, to get rid of him?"

"All I know is the way she'd look at the boy and the father would look at her."

"When Theo left, how did she take it?"

"I was there only a few times after. She was strange in the eyes, like she didn't know me, not saying a word. A little later they were gone. I heard she killed herself in L.A., though that may be just talk."

"Do you think she had sex relations with Theo?"

She sighed. "It might be all in my mind." She gazed off. "He was a fine-looking boy."

I was quiet. Rose closed the sly eyes, took breaths. The shoulders squared, the big body ooched up in the chair, and the eyes looking at me were Ella Banks', shrewd and mocking. The show was over.

She growled, "So now you know everything that anybody in Henniker knows—or maybe not. Maybe I made up Rose Clancy. Sounds like a phony name, doesn't it? Maybe I was just having some fun with you."

I asked if I could call a cab. She nodded to the phone on the wall. I told the guy I'd be on the highway north of town where it turns right. He said about thirty minutes.

I sat and watched her for a minute, she gazing back, knowing I wasn't going to leave it like that.

I said, "You're a joy to talk to. But apart from the game-playing, is what you've told me consistent with what you know and have heard of the Bentleys? Tell me that and I'll be satisfied."

She looked at me straight. "Rose was real. What I told you is the sense of what she told me at various times."

I thanked her and started to get up.

She held up a hand. "Not just Rose, not just gossip. I saw something that morning—four A.M. or thereabouts. I was at the front window and saw headlights, a car stopping on the highway across the river. The lights went out."

"Was that unusual?"

"No, I didn't think anything of it—a car had just pulled over for some reason. I went back to looking at starlight on the river. Twenty minutes passed, maybe. Then the lights came back on, the car was turning down the road that leads to the river."

"Bentley's car?"

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"I don't know, the road winds upriver, then back. I didn't watch where it stopped. It could have been any of the houses over there."

"It could have been Bentley, getting out up there so Theo wouldn't hear the car drive up, walking down to his house—"

"I don't know."

"—letting himself in, spraying the living room, taking the jewelry, sneaking into the sleeping boy's room, sliding the jewelry and the empty spray-can under his bed, then walking back to his car, driving down to the house, finding the door unlocked, the mess inside, the boy in bed—calling the sheriff.

"Thank you, Ella." I gave her hand a squeeze and headed out.

She got the big body up and stood at the dutch door as I started up the path. I went twenty steps and she called, "Stop by next time you're around!"

"I will."

"You lie! All men lie!"

"Cary Grant?"

"Never. Never had to. He'd just look at a girl and—*T I M B E R!*"

I grinned, waved, got same back, and moved up the slope to the highway.

In Cotati, with a long wait for the bus, I had dinner, not getting back to Redwood City until nearly midnight. On Greyhound I'd worked over what I had learned Saturday and Monday, and had a fair idea what could have happened that early morning of May 23, but no clear idea what I, Theo Bentley's defender, should do about it.

I sat on the bed, took off my shoes, thought I'd rest a couple of minutes before continuing the strip, got my legs up on the bed, pulled the sheet over, and passed out.

Susan Miller's bathroom, bright-lit. She lay in the water, throat pouring blood. The wig hung on the hook. She said, "Here they come. I should look nice. Will you hand me my wig?"

I reached but the wig bristled at me and said, "No. I have to be on the hook."

Susan murmured, "Instant magic, and no mess—so much quicker and neater than dyes and rinses. I love my wig. Please hand it to me."

But I got a violent shove from behind and it was two police specialists bearing photo equipment, including an arc lamp that made

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things so bright you could count microbes. I yelled and ran into the living room.

Theo Bentley sat on the couch there. I said, "I thought Robert Mitchum set fire to you and pushed you over a cliff."

Robert Mitchum popped up somewhere, smiled sleepy-eyed, and drawled, "I don't think it was me in that picture," and popped down.

Bentley said, "I don't know for sure but I'm scared that she's old."

"Why does that scare you?"

"Something bad will come down." He licked his lips, looked agitated—the bathroom door was a little open, water was running.

He got up, hurried to the apartment door, opened it, and went out, pulling it shut behind him.

Susan was in the bathroom in her wig and negligee and full makeup, humming as she poured something into the steaming water that made it bubbly and delicious.

Bentley slid back into the apartment. He was naked, brown, and slim, a fine-looking boy of fourteen. He slid into the kitchen and, opening a drawer, frowned down at knives in a tray. He selected one, a paring knife, and went into the closet in the living room, pulling the door almost shut behind him but not quite, peering out the crack with one anxious eye.

"She shouldn't do that," he whispered.

"Do what?"

"Take advantage of a young person who trusts her."

"Is that what your mother did?"

"Is she here?"

"No. It's Susan Miller in there."

"Is Susan Miller a young woman or an old woman playing a game? I have to know."

"Why?"

"Because you can get in all kinds of trouble though you didn't do anything. You can get sent away."

"Did your father fix it so you'd be sent away?"

"He didn't wear a wig and pretend he was young."

Susan came out of the bathroom and looked around. "Where's Theo?"

"In the closet."

She walked into the bedroom, the kitchen—"Theo?" she saw the knife drawer open and pushed it shut. She opened the apartment door and gazed down the hall—"Theo?"

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I asked him, "What are you going to do?" He didn't answer. He watched through the crack and his thumb stroked the knife-edge.

Susan closed the apartment door with a soft slam, locked and bolted it. "Poo!" she pouted fetchingly in the soft light, then saw me. "Why did he go?"

"He didn't. He's in the closet."

She was beautiful. She looked like Liz Taylor at thirty, but I knew she was Susan Miller. Her black wig was beautiful and her figure was beautiful in and through the negligee. So were her eyes—or anyway the mascara, shadow, and lacy lashes were, which I told her.

Suddenly she was scrubbing her cheeks with her fists. Gobs of makeup came off on her knuckles and got up her hands and wrists. She muttered, "He's walked out." She put a gobby hand to her wig, hummed the tune of "That Old Black Magic," then stopped and said musingly, "Is it gone? All gone?"

Her face and hands were a mess. She looked like a clown—face all colors, a big red-blue-and-silver glob on the end of her nose—a dear and waifish clown.

A battered, lopsized face with one smallish eye reared up from somewhere and cried, "Don't let him see you like that!"

"He's gone," said Susan, the adorable clown. "So now I'll strip down and take the beautiful bath I made him."

"He's in the closet!" wailed Jennie. I agreed with her. Susan seemed to not hear us. She pulled off the wig, tossed it on the rug, and fluffed her brown-grey hair.

"Am I so bad for forty-eight?" she asked.

"You're adorable." I felt sad and hapless.

Jennie Hodges scooped up the wig and slapped it back on Susan's head. "Thank you," said Susan, but plucked it off and tossed it. "No more," she said. "The game is over—for the rest of my life I'll be me."

Diane popped up beside Jennie and they leaned on each other, grinning widely. Jennie was now in her pretty reddish wig or rinse job and was no longer battered with unequal eyes and in the soft light looked thirty-two or better. They did a little cross-over dance-step while chanting softly the good old tune, "No more no more no *more* no more—!"

A very large raven joined them, three or four feet tall—several hundred pounds, standing tall. He slipped a wing around Jennie's waist and hopped clumsily with the girls, ruining the swing of the

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song by changing the words to "Nevermore nevermore!" in a creaky voice, which didn't work at all and he knew it, and slunk away.

Cary Grant came striding in, looking his best, which it's impossible for him to look other than, and chirped Britishly, "Any trouble 'ere?"

A fair amount, I said. He said, "Ah, well, it'll probably come out all right," smiling at the three dancers, one being Ella Banks, who had joined the two Fresno girls. She peeled off from them, shrieked, "I'd follow you anywhere!" He chirped, "Come along then," and bounced out, she bounding after, and Diane and Jennie after her.

Susan moved to the bathroom, sliding out of her negligee. I saw that the bathwater was bubbly and steaming, and she started to get in. The wig skipped across the living room, panting, "We're supposed to be on the hooks!" "Why?"—the negligee was in a heap near the bathroom. "I don't know, but we are!" cried the wig, and hopped around the door into the bathroom. The negligee sighed, got up, stretched, then plodded into the bathroom.

Young Theo was at the bathroom door, staring in. The light in there was hard and bright. Her back was to him, in the tub. He looked at greyish hair and middle-aged flesh and murmured, "Hateful, hateful."

"Is she your mother?"

"I never wrote those dirty words."

"Your father framed you—it wasn't her."

"He never wore a wig or pretended he was what he wasn't." He was in the bathroom behind her and seized her hair. The knife was tight in his other fist. "Hateful." He pulled her head back.

She stared up at him. I said, "Why shouldn't Susan play the wig game if she wants to, if it gives her and others pleasure?" He didn't seem to hear me as he slashed.

The raven said, "Nevermore."

I said, "You ruined the girls' song."

"True. But mark my word—nevermore."

We were walking down a mean street, away from the building, the raven and I. I asked, "What should I do about Bentley?" I saw that he was wise, looking like a stern but mellow judge, of whom a few are wise possibly. "Josten wants the jury to see him as violent and dangerous. His case is weak, but if Fresno's allowed he could get a conviction, second degree. *Did* Bentley kill Susan?"

The raven stroked his beak with a wingtip as we paced along. I was anxious for his opinion.

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He said, "Guilt is the jury's concern. A defender's duty is to bring out all elements favorable to his client, and only those."

"Yes. But if Bentley's acquitted, how about the next time a pretty woman picks him up because he's a man older women have an urge to take home and when he gets there he finds she colors her hair or wears a wig and is older? What then?"

He stroked his beak. "You assume he's naive, as you are, but maybe not. Maybe he prowls dark barrooms looking for older women who are pretending they're young. Maybe he knows exactly what will happen when he gets them home and alone."

I knew he was as wise as he looked, which was plenty, though as an entertainer a failure, only qualified to mess up whatever routine he intruded himself into.

He said, "There might have been others before Jennie and Susan, but he was never a suspect."

I said, "I know a pretty lady, fortyish, who sometimes has fun dressing up, getting herself glamorous, coloring her hair. Should she be punished for that? Because Bentley's parents hurt him?"

"There's no evidence of that, only rumor. There's no case against the parents."

"Prison time might help him—he could get psychiatric treatment."

He made strange noises that I guessed added up to a raven laugh.

I said, "Okay. Maybe in five or six years they can do something for him—maybe not. But I don't want him turned loose. I'm going to see Josten about a deal for second. His case is weak, I think he'll go for it."

A slim blond lad in a canvas jacket had fallen into step with us as we walked. The raven said, "Do you call that fair service to your client?"

The slim youth, Bentley, looked at me questioningly. I asked, "Do you remember slashing Susan Miller's throat?"

He was quiet for some paces, looking thoughtful. Then he said, "I remember being afraid of something bad, and that I should leave before it happened. So I did. And here I am, walking back to the hotel."

"What's your last memory of Susan Miller?"

"Going into the bathroom to fix the water."

"Looking young and beautiful?"

"Yes."

I asked the raven, "Is he lying that he doesn't remember what happened?"

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"Perhaps not. If you don't want to remember something bad enough, maybe you can stop remembering."

"Does that make him insane?"

"Are you thinking of an insanity defense?"

"No. I have no grounds for it—only rumors about his past."

The raven said, "Every brutalizer of women has a past which turned into brutality. Nobody savages a woman before the first time. They're not all insane—or maybe they are. But it's not the season for an insanity defense."

We walked a while. This was a dream, but the anxieties I was feeling were real, accounting for the dream.

The raven said, "Put it to him."

I looked at Bentley. "What do you want—a trial or a deal?"

He opened his mouth, but the raven held up a wingtip. "Ask him tomorrow." Bentley had moved away from us, into the Wooster Hotel. "Tell him that if he wants a trial the Henniker story might come out. Tell him that's the risk if he chooses a trial."

I shook my head. "Josten couldn't use it. All rumor and hearsay."

"Tell your client it might come out."

"Why?"

"Maybe so you'll know more than you do now."

He paced away from me, hunched his shoulders, did a few clumsy cross-over steps, chanting "Nevermore nevermore," me watching with a polite smile because he was doing his best but with absolutely no gift for fun although wise. He was still lurching around and croaking when the dream stopped as I woke up to a bright morning.

Shaved, showered, and dressed, I drank coffee, working out what my subconscious, which I guessed was where the dream had come from, was suggesting I do—and why.

"Tell me about Henniker."

"It has nothing to do with anything."

"It might come out at the trial."

He flicked his lips with his tongue. His legs were crossed. One heel tapped the linoleum.

"If it comes out, I should be prepared for it."

"Do you think it'll come out?"

"It could—if there's a trial."

He repeated my last words slowly, getting the implication. "Are you thinking of a deal—like Fresno?"

"That's up to you."

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"What kind of a deal?"

"Second degree, fifteen years, no minimum before parole consideration, meaning five or six years, then parole. You'd be out before you're thirty."

After a while he said, "I didn't kill that lady."

I was quiet, watching him. He looked at his hands, tightening and loosening on his upper knee. The heel tapped.

My dream had been just a motion picture of my own anxieties. I didn't know if he was guilty or not, dangerous to older women or not.

I was about to find out, maybe.

I had told him a trial could mean opening up the past. Innocence would scream at him that he had to risk that, whatever pain and horror lay back there—innocence must be served! Guilt, fearing everything, would fear being stripped naked by the past. Innocence would go for a trial and damn the torpedoes—guilt would go for a deal.

Like Fresno?

I could be wrong—I knew that. But the part of my subconscious that was the raven had told me to put the choice to him with the Henniker hook attached on one side, and maybe learn something.

He raised his eyes, said again, "I didn't kill that lady."

Some time passed. He continued to look at me. I saw or imagined faint cloudiness in the clear eyes. They drifted back to his hands.

I looked at my watch. He blew air, looked tired. "Will I have to—say I did it?"

"No." I got up, so did he.

I took a limp hand. "I'll get back to you." With a coin I rapped on the glass. "Take care."

He nodded, got up a sort of smile. He had a glazed look—something unexpected had come down.

That was three years ago. He went to Soledad to do that part of a fifteen-year sentence he'd do before parole. The DA, who has clout, had written a private letter to the psychiatrist there, telling the Henniker rumor that I'd passed on to him, through Josten, and suggesting treatment for Bentley as called for. I don't know if he got any, or if it would have done any good, or if he even needed it. It became unimportant as eight months into his sentence he was stabbed sixteen–eighteen times, by whom or why never found out, and died in the hospital there.

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As Rose Clancy had told Ella, who had passed it on to me, he'd been a fine-looking boy.

I don't know if he slashed Susan Miller and beat on Jennie Hodges, or if both times it was somebody who showed up later. I don't know if the Henniker rumor, even if one hundred percent true, was relevant to those brutalities.

I know that telling him that the Henniker story might come out was a lie, maybe causing him to opt for Soledad, meaning a brutal death at age twenty-four.

You do what you do. I can live with it.

DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Hic iacet Steven "Ante" Ambler,
An active (but now passive) gambler,
So open, candid, and naive
He wore his heart upon his sleeve—
And such a pet of Lady Luck's
He kept on winning megabucks.
Or so believed his poker pards
Until they happened to count the cards
And, oddly, found there seemed to be
Not fifty-two but fifty-three,
Counting the ace of hearts that Steve
Usually carried in his sleeve.

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20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: *Copy and payment must be in by the* 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

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Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
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(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

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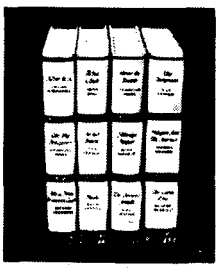

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Well, I just have a definite flare."

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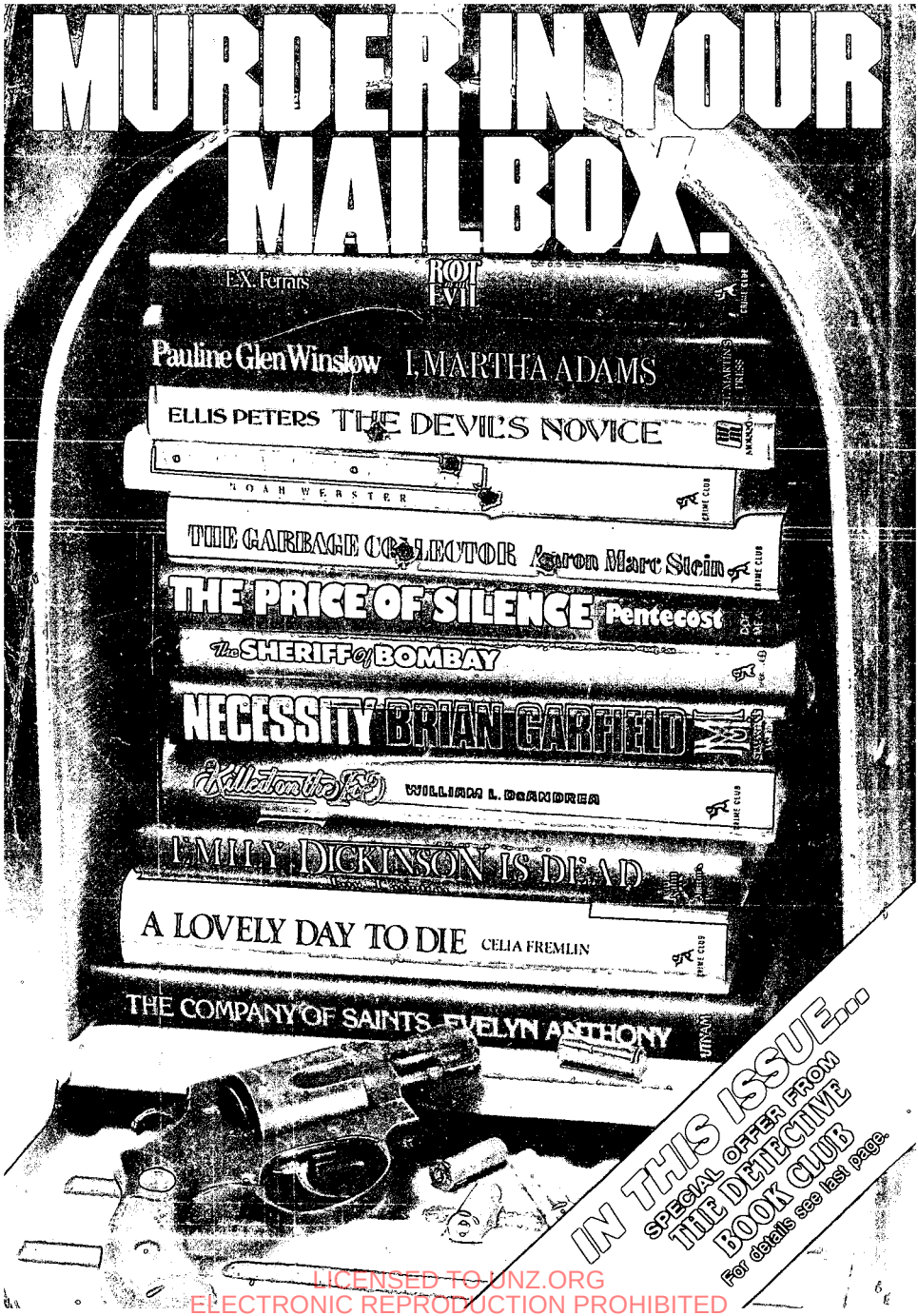

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